Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qurʾan

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

Volume 15
Second Edition (2020)

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

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English translation
Second edition 1442/2020

Translated from the original Arabic titled: *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* as published by Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Ṭābʿiah li-Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn fī al-Ḥawzah al-ʿIlmiyyah fī Qumm al-Muqaddasah, 1417 AH [vol. 8].

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Published by: Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

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O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

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In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Moses	Moses
Dāwūd	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Hārūn	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Yūsuf	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary		

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Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

The English volumes 15 and 16 are translations of the Arabic volume 8 of *al-Mīzān*, which covers Sūrah al-Aʿrāf (chapter 7) of the Qur'an. Some students of the author and some teachers of *tafsīr* have identified this part as the peak of *al-Mīzān*. Interested readers are sometimes advised to start with this volume because it bears many principal discussions that equip the reader with the essential tools in *tafsīr*. Having learnt how to fish, the student of Qur'an can explore the other parts of this ocean more independently, and enjoy more fulfilling catches. Volume 1, on the other hand, could deter some readers by some of its intricate discussions.

Early in this sūrah, we read the story of Adam's creation, which is also found at the beginning of the Bible, and in the early pages of the Qur'an in Sūrah al-Baqarah. In volume 15, the author presents some in-depth discussions on some topics including: the devil, the *ṭīnah* (clay, substance), felicity and wretchedness, and the divine Throne. In volume 16, He analyzes Prophet Moses' request to "see" God, the primordial covenant of all humankind with their Lord, and the significance of the divine names.

The author does not hesitate to challenge and clarify common superficial understandings of the Qur'an and hadith. He points out their inner inconsistencies, and offers an ingenious alternative reading that is supported by both scriptural and rational evidence. He extracts from the Qur'an and hadith rational principles and conclusions that can also be presented to, and appreciated by, non-Muslims. Despite his Islamic terminology, his profound discussions can be a basis for conducting a meaningful dialogue with other schools and traditions, whether religious or not.

One example of this is his discussions on the human soul and its knowledge of God under verses 7:143 and 7:172 in volume 16. He provides some thought-provoking principles that are not to be found in the works of almost any Muslim scholar. He first points out our inner sense of *need* which is inseparable from any aspect of our existence. Then he equates the realization of this need with the realization of the substratum which sustains it. This is an intuitive knowledge of the Infinite Source of existence, which is inseparable from us, just like our need. This kind of knowledge is neither mental nor metaphorical; nor is it something to be

acquired through books and schooling.

A major theme that runs through this entire sūrah is the concept of God's *āyah* (pl. *āyāt*), which literally means "sign." The Qur'an has a very broad definition of *āyah*. Anything that indicates God is an *āyah*. This would include His entire creation. All beings in existence—whether animate or inanimate, physical or non-physical, temporal or atemporal, pleasant or unpleasant, good or evil—are signs of the power, wisdom and mercy of their Creator. Any event that can turn our attention to the Absolute Reality which sustains and support it, is a sign of the divine. With this, it should also be clear why *āyah* is sometimes translated as "communication," and the verses of the Qur'an are called *āyāt*. God's communications include not only His Book of Legislation (*kitāb al-tadwīn*), but also His Book of Creation (*kitāb al-takwīn*). Any sign of God—which means anything that we encounter—bears a message for us. It is a "gift" from our Friend, intended to connect us back to Him.

In line with its emphasis on the "signs" of God, the sūrah also repeatedly highlights the concept of *dhikr* (remembrance, mindfulness, invocation). The meaning of *dhikr* is twofold. One side of it is almost identical to *āyah*, and can be translated as "reminder." The Qur'an is a reminder. All our trials and tribulations in life—including both ease and hardship—are reminders. The messages and miracles of the prophets, and the stories of their people, are all reminders.

The other side of *dhikr* is *our* remembrance and mindfulness of God, which is the purpose behind the first aspect of *dhikr*. That is our state of being conscious, as opposed to being heedless and inadvertent. It means penetrating the colors on the surface, and beholding the colorless Reality that runs through them all. It means breaking out of our endless mental drama, and observing every event as an expression of Being. It means transcending time, where we are no longer ensnared in thoughts about the past and the future, and choosing to experience the most current manifestation of Existence, which can only be found in this moment.

This is the sūrah's criterion for salvation. While God's universal mercy *embraces all things* (7:156), His particular mercy is *for those who are Godwary and give the alms and those who believe in Our signs* (7:156). On the other hand: *Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans… It is they who are the heedless* (7:179). Being heedless means going through life behind a veil of illusion, and living in a mode

of separation. That amounts to self-caused suffering, which is the reality of hell. In contrast, God's particular mercy—which is the same as paradise and bliss (*ananda*)—is for those who see everything as a sign of God, and thus pierce through pluralities to reach oneness. The Qur'an says elsewhere: *Remember Allah much, so that you may be felicitous* (8:45, 62:10). This was also a salient feature of the author's life and character: the highest virtue to him was *murāqabah*, which can be translated as both "meditation" and "mindfulness": the former being the practice, and the latter being the result. In fact, *taqwá*, which is the highest and most comprehensive virtue in the Qur'an, can arguably and plausibly be translated as "mindfulness."

His attributes are many, but the essence is one;
The point is the same, but the expressions are a ton.
One must be aware to notice the King,
Regardless of the garment that He has put on.[1]

I would like to thank Dr. Amina Inloes for editing both volumes. I am also very indebted to Ali Khalfan, the director of Tawheed Institute, for his relentless, responsible and professional effort in coordinating this project, without demanding any recognition or reward for it. There are several other unsung heroes here, who have helped the project in a variety of ways, directly and indirectly. They remain anonymous, and their reward is with their Lord. While acknowledging the help of the crew, I bear full responsibility for any mistakes or shortcomings in this work.

It is narrated that the author dedicated the reward of writing *al-Mīzān* to the souls of his parents. Likewise, I dedicate the reward of my translation—if it is of any worth—to my parents. May God amplify their good deeds, overlook their sins, and resurrect them with the Qur'an and the one who brought it.

Tawus Raja
June 2018, Ramadan 1439
Edited: December 2020

1 ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-SayyidMuḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

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1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers, particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige

which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 7

al-Aʿrāf

(The Elevations)

Verses 1-93

Verses 1-9

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

المص ﴿١﴾ كِتابٌ أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ فَلا يَكُنْ فِي صَدْرِكَ حَرَجٌ مِنْهُ لِتُنْذِرَ بِهِ وَ ذِكْرى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾ اتَّبِعُوا ما أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَ لا تَتَّبِعُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِياءَ قَلِيلاً ما تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾ وَ كَمْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْناها فَجاءَها بَأْسُنا بَياتاً أَوْ هُمْ قائِلُونَ ﴿٤﴾ فَما كانَ دَعْواهُمْ إِذْ جاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنا إِلاَّ أَنْ قالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظالِمِينَ ﴿٥﴾ فَلَنَسْئَلَنَّ الَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَ لَنَسْئَلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٦﴾ فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بِعِلْمٍ وَ ما كُنَّا غائِبِينَ ﴿٧﴾ وَ الْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوازِينُهُ فَأُولئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٨﴾ وَ مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوازِينُهُ فَأُولئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ بِما كانُوا بِآياتِنا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

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In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

(7:1) Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād.

(7:2) *[This is] a Book that has been sent down to you, so let there be no disquiet in your heart on its account, that you may warn thereby and as a reminder for the believers.*

(7:3) *Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and do not follow any masters besides Him. Little is the admonition that you take!*

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(7:4) *How many a town We have destroyed! Our punishment came to it at night, or while they were taking a midday nap.*

(7:5) *Then their cry, when Our punishment overtook them, was only that they said, "We have indeed been wrongdoers!"*

(7:6) *Then We will surely question those to whom the messengers were*

sent, and We will surely question the messengers.

(7:7) *Then We will surely recount to them with knowledge, and We have not been absent.*

(7:8) *The weight [of deeds] on that day is the truth. As for those whose scales are heavy, it is they who are the felicitous.*

(7:9) *As for those whose scales are light—it is they who have ruined their souls, because they used to wrong Our signs.*

Introduction

This sūrah includes the main themes that are found in chapters which start with *Alif-Lām-Mīm* [Chapters 2, 3, 29, 30, 31 and 32], and the one chapter which starts with *Ṣād* [Chapter 38]. We shall elaborate this further when we discuss the disjointed letters in the Qur'an at the beginning of Chapter 42 (al-Shūrá), by the will of God.

What seems to be central in this chapter is God's covenant with humankind to serve Him alone and not associate anything with Him. The chapter discusses how humanity has kept up with this covenant throughout its history, explaining how the divine covenant was broken and forgotten by most nations and societies. As a result, whenever they faced divine signs or prophets that reminded them of their covenant and called them to it, most people denied the signs, persecuted the prophets, and failed to pay heed—except for a minority.

The divine covenant is a concise version of the entire religious call. Meanwhile, people vary in terms of their capacity to accept or reject this call when they face it, and the call also varies in terms of the place, conditions and environment where it appears. The result is that some souls—not all— find their way to believing in God and His signs, because they have remained loyal to their initial purity and pristine disposition (*fiṭrah*). However, the souls of most people incline toward the earthly life and plunge into worldly pleasures. Thus, they end in disbelief and defiance. Following this division, the believers receive aid, support and victory from God in this world; and are saved from hell, admitted to paradise, and blessed with abundant heavenly pleasures in the hereafter. As for the disbelievers, in this world they meet God's wrath, curse and punishment which kills them, cuts their line of progeny, extinguishes their fire of mischief, and turns them into shattered stories in history. *Yet the punishment of the hereafter is surely more disgraceful, and they will not be helped* (41:16). This

has been God's custom in dealing with the previous nations, and it shall be the same with the future generations. *Allah judges, and there is none who may repeal His judgement* (13:41); and He *is on a straight path* (11:56).

Explaining this custom of God to the unbelievers so that they may believe in God and His communications would be an example of "warning" (*indhār*). If the audience are already believers who have an overall knowledge of God and His Lordship, the discussion would serve as a "reminder" (*tadhkīr*) of God's signs, whereby they are taught what they need to know about God, His excellent names, His splendid attributes, and His custom in dealing with people in this world and the next. This twofold objective is mentioned in the second verse of the chapter, saying that the purpose of the sūrah is to warn and remind: *that you may warn thereby and as a reminder for the believers*.

This chapter was revealed in Mecca, although there is some difference of opinion about some of its verses. Accordingly, the verses are directed at the polytheists and a minority of believers who had believed in the Prophet in Mecca. The beginning and ending verses show that the chapter is a general warning for all people, as it includes proofs, admonitions and lessons. This is seen throughout the chapter, discussing the stories of Adam, Satan (Iblīs), Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel) and Moses. At the same time, it is a reminder for the believers because it includes a brief description of their faith in God, the hereafter, and the signs of God.

Some of the sublime discussions in this chapter are:

(1) The Hour, the scale (*mīzān*), and *aʿrāf* (heights, elevations, ramparts) [7:6-9, 7:37-51];
(2) Satan and his hosts [7:27];
(3) The idea that the Qur'an has *taʾwīl* (fulfillment, underlying reality) [7:53];
(4) The Throne [7:54];
(5) God's manifestation (*tajallī*) [7:143];
(6) God's covenant with humankind in *ʿālam al-dharr* (world of pre-existence, world of scattered particles) [7:172-174];
(7) God's excellent names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusná*) [7:180];
(8) Those who are mindful of God [7:201].

The chapter also includes a concise reference to religious obligations and prohibitions, as we read: *Say, "My Lord has enjoined justice"* (7:29) and:

Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?" (7:32). We can infer that this chapter was revealed before Chapter 6 (Sūrah al-Anʿām), because there we read: *Say, "I do not find in what has been revealed to me that anyone be forbidden to eat except…"* (6:145). Based on this verse, the lawfulness of consuming anything that God has not specifically forbidden was revealed *prior to* Chapter 6. This law of permissibility is to be found in verse 7:32.

Another sign that this chapter was revealed before Chapter 6 is that the legal and practical rulings found in this chapter are more concise and less differentiated than the ones mentioned in Sūrah al-Anʿām, where we read: *Say, "Come, I will recount what your Lord has forbidden you from…"* (6:151-153). This is how the rules in Islam were legislated: through a gradual process from concise laws to more elaborate ones.

Commentary

المص ﴿١﴾ كِتابٌ أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ فَلا يَكُنْ فِي صَدْرِكَ حَرَجٌ مِنْهُ لِتُنْذِرَ بِهِ وَ ذِكْرى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

(7:1-2) ***Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād. [This is] a Book that has been sent down to you, so let there be no disquiet in your heart on its account, that you may warn thereby and as a reminder for the believers.***

The word "Book" (*kitābun*) is mentioned in an indefinite form, and the sender (the subject of the sentence) is not mentioned. Both these points serve to glorify and aggrandize the Book and its Sender. There is something special about this Book and its Sender. That is why the next part of the verse is mentioned as a consequence and conclusion to this, indicated by the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore): *so let there be no* (fa-lā) *disquiet in your heart on its account*. It is as if God is saying: "This is a blessed Book which discusses God's communications, sent down to you by your Lord. Therefore you should feel no anxiety in yourself." This implies that if the Book were a different book, or if it were revealed by anyone other than your Lord, then it you could rightfully feel constrained and constricted by it because of the difficulties and troubles involved in preaching it to the people and calling them to its message of guidance.

… that you may warn thereby…: This is the purpose and objective of

God sending the Book. The same is true about the next phrase:

… and as a reminder for the believers: Since the verse specifically ascribes "reminder" [in this phrase] to the believers, it shows that the "warning" [in the previous phrase] is for everyone. The meaning is: "God has sent down this Book to you so that you may warn the people; and it is a reminder for the believers in particular." It is a reminder exclusively for the believers because it reminds them of their Lord through its divine signs and teachings. Thus they increase in faith and revel in these teachings. As for the rest of the people, this Book is a warning because it talks about God's wrath and punishment for the wrongdoers in the hereafter, and His exterminating punishment in this world, as found in the stories of the previous nations discussed in the Qur'an.

According to some exegetes, *that you may warn thereby* is a continuation of *let there be no disquiet in your heart*. The meaning would be: "Let there be no disquiet in your heart in warning the people by means of this Book." This interpretation, however, is problematic because it is inconsistent with the what follows after: *and as a reminder for the believers*.

Other exegetes have said that "believers" include both those who were already believers at the time of revelation of the Qur'an, and those whom God knew would believe later.[1] Given our interpretation above, the problem with this view should be clear, because the "reminder" mentioned in this verse would only be applicable to those who were believers actually, not potentially.

اتَّبِعُوا ما أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَ لا تَتَّبِعُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِياءَ قَلِيلاً ما تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(7:3) ***Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and do not follow any masters besides Him. Little is the admonition that you take!***

Since God clarified to His Prophet that this Book is revealed to him for the purpose of warning the people, He launches into the actual warning. That is why the verse is addressed to the people, because a message of warning should be directed at its audience. The point in addressing the Prophet was achieved in the last verse.

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1 The second group does not refer to those who would be born later, but to unbelievers at the time of revelation who would convert later. (Trans.)

The verse is an imperative statement, where God orders the people to follow what has been sent to them from their Lord. That corresponds to the Qur'an, which preaches to them correct belief and right practice. Correct belief means belief in God and His communications, and right practice means righteous action. God has enjoined both of these in His Book and has prohibited their opposites. The first part of the verse—*Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord*— is expressed in an indirect way. What is really meant by it is: "Embrace the *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority, mastership) of God." This can be inferred from the second part of the verse, where God does not contrast the first part by saying, "and do not follow other than what has been sent down to you," but He says: *and do not follow any masters besides Him*. The meaning of the second part is: "You should not follow other than God, which are many. Otherwise, they will be your masters (in plural form) besides Him."

… Little is the admonition that you take: If you listen and pay attention, then you will realize that God alone is your Lord, not anyone or anything else. You have no other master besides Him.

وَ كَمْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْناها فَجاءَها بَأْسُنا بَياتاً أَوْ هُمْ قائِلُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(7:4) ***How many a town We have destroyed! Our punishment came to it at night*** **(bayātan)**, ***or while they were taking a midday nap*** **(qāʾilūn).**

This verse reminds the audience about God's consistent custom with regards to the polytheists of the previous nations. They adopted masters besides God, and thus God destroyed them by sending them a punishment, either at night or during the day, while they admitted that they were wrongdoers.

Bayāt is the same as *tabyīt*, which means "raiding at night." *Qāʾilūn* means people in a state of *qaylūlah*, which is a "midday nap." Instead of saying, "at night or during the day," the verse says, "raiding at night or while they were taking a midday nap." This expression apparently refers to God's punishment overtaking them while they were resting peacefully, feeling secure from the grievous divine punishment awaiting them. The mention of "nocturnal raid" and "midday nap" points to their state of heedlessness [of the divine message].

فَما كانَ دَعْواهُمْ إِذْ جاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنا إِلاَّ أَنْ قالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظالِمِينَ ﴿٥﴾

(7:5) ***Then their cry, when Our punishment overtook them, was only that they said, "We have indeed been wrongdoers!"***

This verse continues the admonition in the last verse. It points to the fact that we humans admit it in our soul and conscience when we adopt other masters besides God and associate them with Him. Now, if we do not acknowledge this willingly and do not humble ourselves voluntarily before our Lord, then God's custom is to make us confess to it by punishment. Therefore, we had best recognize God's Lordship on our own accord, or else we will soon admit it by force.

فَلَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ الَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَ لَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ۝٦

(7:6) ***Then We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will surely question the messengers.***

The message of the previous verses was that people are responsible for accepting monotheism and abandoning other masters besides God. They are not left on their own to act as they wish and pursue any path that they want. Therefore, it follows that they will be accountable for what they have been commanded: faith and righteous deeds. In other words, they will be questioned concerning correct beliefs and right actions. This responsibility rests on two sides: (1) the messenger who is sent to the people; and (2) the people who receive the messenger. The questioning mentioned in this verse is a logical consequence of the previous verses about the towns which were destroyed, and which confessed to wrongdoing. That is why this verse starts with the letter *fā'* (then, so, therefore), which shows *tafrī'* (consequence, conclusion): *Then We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will surely question the messengers.*

Given the above explanation, the two groups mentioned in this verse should be clear: (1) *those to whom the messengers were sent* refer to the people; (2) *the messengers* refer to the prophets and messengers [from humankind]. Some exegetes have identified the first group as the prophets, and the second group as the angels. However, this does not comply with the theme and context of the verse, because it excludes the polytheists from the verse, while the whole discussion revolves around them. Moreover, the next verse is not congruent with the suggested interpretation. Finally, there was no mention of the angels in the previous verses, neither primarily, nor in light of others.

فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بِعِلْمٍ وَ ما كُنَّا غائِبِينَ ﴿٧﴾

(7:7) ***Then We will surely recount to them with knowledge, and We have not been absent.***

The last verse was based on the idea that people are under the Lordship and direction of God; thus they will face questioning and retribution for their actions. This will only be effective if the inquirer is aware of what they did. Otherwise, the people may lie in order to gain a benefit or avoid a loss, especially given their critical and frightening position in the hereafter, where they are at the risk of eternal damnation and everlasting loss. That is why the verse starts with the letter *fā*ʾ (then, so, therefore), showing consequence: *Then We will surely recount to them with knowledge*.

The word *ʿilm* (knowledge) is in the indefinite form, which indicates the significance of divine knowledge. It means such knowledge that is free from error and mistake. This is further emphasized by adding: *and We have not been absent*. This statement shows that God is ever present, watching, and never missing from the scene. He has assigned angels who keep record of people's deeds by writing, and He Himself encompasses them all.[1]

وَ الْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوازِينُهُ فَأُولئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٨﴾ وَ مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوازِينُهُ فَأُولئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ بِما كانُوا بِآياتِنا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(7:8-9) ***The weight [of deeds] on that day is the truth. As for those whose scales are heavy, it is they who are the felicitous. As for those whose scales are light—it is they who have ruined their souls, because they used to wrong Our signs.***

These two verses talk about weighing in the hereafter, which pertains to the deeds, or to the people in terms of their deeds. What will be weighed on scales are the actions of the people based on the following verses: (1) *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed We shall produce it and We suffice as reckoners* (21:47). Based on this verse, "scales" are part of God's "reckoning," and reckoning pertains to actions.

1 In other words, the plural pronouns and verbs refer to God and His angels. (Trans.)

(2) *So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:7-8). These verses are even clearer evidence, because they talk about the weight of *ʿamal* (action, work, deed), both good and bad.

Therefore, the weighing will be for acts, not for the agents. Based on this verse, every action, whether good or bad, has some weight. Elsewhere God says: *They are the ones who deny the signs of their Lord and the encounter with Him. So their works have failed. On the Day of Resurrection We will not set for them any scale* (18:105). This verse refers to the case of *ḥabṭ* (failure, cancellation, annulment) of actions, where there will be nothing to be weighed. Hence, only those actions which remain until that day will be weighed. We discussed the concept of *ḥabṭ* under verses 2:216-218.[1] Based on this, whatever good or evil deed that remains and is not annulled until the Day of Judgment will have some weight which will be measured.

Meanwhile, the verses of the Qur'an talk about the *relative* weights of deeds [not absolute weights]. That is, according to the Qur'an, good deeds will be heavy on the scale, while evil deeds will make one's scale light. This is contrary to the idea of weighing both good and evil deeds, and then comparing the two to see which one is heaver—and thus judging whether one should go to paradise or to hell, depending on whether their good deeds or evil deeds dominate. If that were the case, then it could be that the two weights may equal, as we see in two-plate or single-plate scales and other types of scales in this world.

Instead, the verses of the Qur'an suggest that good deeds will appear heavy on one's scale, while evil deeds will appear light. This is the apparent meaning of the current two verses of discussion (7:8-9). We also see the same idea in the following verses: *Then those whose scales are heavy—it is they who are the felicitous. As for those whose scales are light—they will be the ones who have ruined their souls, [and] they will remain in hell [forever]* (23:102-103); *As for him whose scales are heavy, he will have a pleasing life. But as for him whose scales are light, his home will be the Abyss. And what will show you what it is? It is a scorching fire!* (101:6-11). As we can see, these verses consistently ascribe heaviness to good deeds, and lightness evil deeds.

The above observation strengthens another view about the scales: There must be an objective and external standard for weighing the deeds,

1 See volume 3, pp. 218ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

where the deeds are classified as heavy or light based on how well they match that standard. That standard is what determines the heaviness or lightness of one's scale. This is exactly the same as what we see in our ordinary scales, where there is a unit of weight with which we measure objects. We place the unit in one side of the scale, and the object on the other side. If the two sides match, then we judge that the object has the desired weight. Otherwise, we take it off and reject it. This means that the real "means or instrument of weighing" (which is the literal meaning of "scale," *mīzān*) is that unit or standard, not what we conventionally call a "scale." The conventional scale—such as the two-plate or single-plate scales that we use—is rather a preparative instrument to the real weighing. Otherwise, it is our standard unit which determines the weight of objects. The same is true in other measurements such as length, where we have units like meters or feet which are used to determine the length of objects and distances. To get a desired length, we must match our object with the unit. If it does not match, then our object lacks the desired measurability, and we will leave it aside.

This shows that there must be a standard unit to weigh the deeds. In the case of the prayer (*ṣalāh*), for instance, the unit would be the perfect prayer, which means meeting and fulfilling the reality of prayer (*ḥaqq al-ṣalāh*). The same can be said about obligatory almsgiving, optional charity, and so on. Likewise, the unit for weighing speech would be truthful speech which is free from any mix of falsehood. This idea [that one should perform every act as it is due to its reality] can be seen in the verse: *O you who believe! Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him* (3:102).[1]

***The weight [of deeds] on that day is the truth…*:** Given the above picture, the meaning of this phrase is that "the truth" will be the standard for measuring the deeds on the Day of Judgment. To the extent that there is truth in any action, it will have weight and value. Good deeds will be heavy on the scale because they include the truth, while evil deeds will have no weight because they are nothing but falsehood and vanity. Therefore, God will weigh the deeds on that day with the measure of truth, and the weight of each deed will be according to how much truth there is in it.

A similar expression to this is seen elsewhere in the Qur'an, about "judgment by the truth": *And the earth will glow with the light of her Lord,*

1 Another similar verse is: *And strive for Allah's cause with the striving that is due to Him* (22:78). (Trans.)

and the book will be set up, and the prophets and the martyrs will be brought, and judgment will be made between them with truth, and they will not be wronged (39:69). The "book" mentioned in this verse will be set up for the purpose of making judgment. It is the same book mentioned in the verse: *This is Our book, which speaks against you with truth* (45:29). This verse shows that the book will reveal the truth in the deeds, and the scale will determine their weight.

Based on the above explanation, *wazn* in this verse is a noun meaning "weight" or "heaviness" (*thiql*). It is not a verb referring to the act of weighing and measuring. It is also notable that the verses talk about "scales" (*mawāzīn*) in the plural form: *As for those whose scales are heavy* (7:8); *As for those whose scales are light* (7:9). This refers to the fact that every individual will have multiple scales, since each deed will have a measure of its own. The truth of prayer, for instance, is different from the truth of almsgiving, the truth of fasting, the truth of pilgrimage, and so on. This should be evident, and it should clarify our interpretation above.

Another suggested interpretation is: "The true weighing [of deeds] will be on that day," where "weighing" (*wazn*) is the subject, "true" (*ḥaqq*) is its adjective, and "will be on that day" is the predicate. This is how *al-Kashshāf* has interpreted the verse, with the following explanation: "It means: The weighing on that day—when God shall question the nations and their messengers—will be a true weighing." This is an unlikely interpretation, unless we consider the verse on its own, disconnected from the context of the previous verses.

The majority of exegetes, however, have suggested a different interpretation. They have interpreted the first sentence as: "The weighing [of deeds] on that day is a true weighing," where the first "weighing" (*wazn*) is the subject; "on that day" is the temporal container (that is, the time when the event will occur); the second "is a weighing" is an implied predicate; and "true" (*ḥaqq*) is its adjective which means "just" or "fair" (*ʿadl*). Based on this interpretation, the verse is effectively saying: *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection* (21:47).

***… As for those whose scales* (mawāzīnuhu) *are heavy…*:** As we said above, *mawāzīn* is the plural of *mīzān* (scale). This is how the term is used in the verse that we just quoted: *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection* (21:47).

According to the popular interpretation of most exegetes [that the

verse's first sentence means: "The weighing [of deeds] on that day will be fair"], *mawāzīn* would be the plural of *mawzūn* (lit. "that which is weighed," in the accusative case), referring to the actions that will be weighed.[1] Another possibility is to interpret *mawāzīn* as the plural of *mīzān*, on the basis that there will be multiple [true] scales according to the variety of actions being weighed.[2] However, there is a problem with these interpretations. It is assumed that *ḥaqq* (true, truth) means *ʿadl* (just, fair), as an attribute of the scales. This does not explain how the scales become heavy with good deeds and light with sins. Instead, the Qur'an says: *We shall set up the scales of justice* (al-mawāzīn al-qisṭ) *on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed We shall produce it and We suffice as reckoners* (21:47), where *qisṭ* is synonymous with *ʿadl* (just, fair). In this verse, the adjective "just" refers to God's act of weighing. It is not an attribute of scales. That is why the verse says: *and no soul will be wronged…*, which effectively means that "God will not wrong them." Hence, *qisṭ* (justice, fairness) is a quality of God's act [of setting up the scales], not a quality of the scales [themselves]. In other words, we cannot say that "the scales will be just" but we should say, "the *setting* of the scales will be a just setup." The reader should reflect on this.

In order to solve the above problem, some exegetes have opted for a metaphorical interpretation, saying that "the scales being heavy or light" refers to "the good deeds dominating the evil deeds, or vice versa." The verse would then mean: "The scales on that day will be just, meaning that one side will outweigh the other justly. Those whose good deeds overbalance their evil deeds, it is they who are the felicitous. As for those whose scales do not tilt in favor of their good deeds—due to their many sins—they are those who have ruined their souls because they were unjust to Our signs through their denial." The idea of "ruining their souls" refers to losing their most important asset, which is their own selves.

In response to the above explanation, we ask: What is the criterion for determining which act overbalances the other? Especially when a person has both good deeds and evil deeds, and when different deeds have different weights? How can we know which side dominates the other?

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1 The meaning would be: "As for those whose actions are heavy…" (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "The scale [of deeds] on that day is a just scale. As for those whose scales are heavy…" (Trans.)

When God says that the weighing on that day will be fair, it means that the weighing will have such solid basis that will leave no excuse or objection for the people against God's judgment. This means that there must be some reality which is absent from evil deeds but is present in good deeds, and that is what determines the heaviness or lightness of the actions, and the resulting position of the scales. Otherwise, the weight of each deed would be something arbitrary and baseless.

Therefore, we are back to our suggested interpretation—that the actions will be weighed by the standard of *ḥaqq* (truth, reality, fact of the matter). That is the meaning of "fair weighing." Then, those who have a heavy balance—due to having truth in their actions— *it is they who are the felicitous*. And those whose scales are light—due to not fulfilling the necessary right of servitude by their deeds— *it is they who have ruined their souls, because they used to wrong Our signs*. They "wronged Our signs" by rejecting them; and they "ruined their souls" by not advancing the provision that they need for their eternal life. They destroyed themselves by landing *in the house of ruin: hell, which they shall enter, and it is an evil abode* (14:28-29).

This is the most apparent and straightforward interpretation of the verses, without involving any indirect or hidden meaning. Based on our interpretation, two points should be clear: (1) The weighing on the Day of Resurrection will consist of matching the deeds with the standard of truth. To the extent that an act comprises of the truth, it will be rewarded. Otherwise, it will result in perdition. This is the just balance. (2) Every person will have multiple scales that will be set up to weigh their deeds. The touchstone for weighing every deed will be its perfect performance which does justice to that act. The Day of Resurrection is a day when nothing will have any power of influence except the truth. On that day all authority will belong to God, Who is the Truth. God says: *That is the day of truth* (78:39); *There, all authority belongs to Allah, the Truth* (18:44); *There every soul will examine what it has sent in advance, and they will be returned to Allah, their True Master, and what they will lose what they used to fabricate* (10:30).

As we discussed above, some exegetes have suggested that the verse's language is figurative, where *ḥaqq* (true, truth) means *ʿadl* (just, fair), and the "heaviness of scale" refers to the outweighing of good deeds.

Others have favored a more literal meaning, saying that on the Day of

Judgment, God will set up a scale like scales in this world with two plates and balancing arrows. This is how the good and evil deeds of people will be weighed. These exegetes have differed over the details of such weighing. According to them, actions are accidents (*aʿrāḍ*) which have vanished, and it is metaphysically impossible to bring an accident back to existence once it turns into non-existence. Moreover, actions do not have weights to be set on a scale. To circumvent these problems, they have offered the following interpretations:

(1) It is the *books* of deeds which will be weighed, not the deeds.
(2) Every good or evil deed will have a particular effect and sign which will appear on that day. It is these *signs* which will be weighed before everyone.
(3) Good deeds will appear in forms that are fair, and evil deeds will appear in forms that are foul. It is these *forms* which will be weighed.
(4) It is the *people* which will be weighed, meaning the believers and disbelievers, not their good or evil deeds.
(5) Weighing (*Wazn*) refers to a stage where the value and merit of every person will manifest. The "heaviness of scale" means one's high worth and lofty rank. The "lightness of scale" indicates one's ignobility and wickedness.

Despite their discrepancy, the above views have one thing in common: there is no textual proof in the verse to support any of them. In addition, none of them defines the basis for the weight of deeds; they all assume that the weights are arbitrary. As we explained above, this is problematic because an arbitrary basis is not sufficient to conclude God's argument against His servants [which is the whole point of setting up the scales and weighing the deeds on the Day of Judgment].

Examining Narrations

(1) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Sūrah al-Aʿrāf was revealed in Mecca.[1]
(2) Qatādah said: There is one verse in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf which is Medinan: *Ask them about the town that was situated on the*

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḍarīs, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Naḥḥās's *al-Nāsikh*, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*. *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also narrated this from Ibn al-Zubayr, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

seaside… (7:163).[1] The rest are Meccan.[2]

Author's comment: This is Qatādah's personal opinion. We will discuss this below [under verses 7:163ff].

(3) Concerning verse 7:6 (*Then We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent…*) the Messenger of God said: Indeed my Lord shall call me and He will certainly ask me, "Did you convey [My message] to My servants?" I will respond, "My Lord! Surely I conveyed [Your message] to them." Those of you who are present must transmit [the message] to those who are absent. You will also be summoned after [me], while your mouths will be muzzled. Your thighs and palms[3] will be the first members [of your body] which will disclose about you [your deeds and secrets].[4]

(4) The Prophet said: All of you are guardians, and all of you shall be questioned about your subordinates. A ruler will be asked about his citizens. A man will be questioned regarding his family. A woman will be asked about her husband's house [and/or household]. A servant will be questioned concerning the possessions of his master.[5]

Author's comment: There are many narrations to this effect. There are abundant narrations about questioning (*suʾāl*) on the Day of Resurrection, through both Shia and Sunni chains of transmission. We will present them under the relevant verses, by the will of God.

(5) The Messenger of God said: The scale will be set up on the Day of Resurrection, whereby [one's] good deeds and evil deeds will be weighed [against each other]. If one's good deeds outweigh his evil deeds, he will enter paradise. If one's evil deeds outweigh

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1 Apparently this also includes the next few verses which continue the same story. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir and Abū al-Shaykh.

3 This refers to verses which talk about different organs testifying to one's deeds: 24:24, 36:65, 41:20. Given the parlance of narrations, "thighs" will acknowledge sexual sins and "palms" will admit financial sins and unlawful acquisitions. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, on the authority of Muʿāwiyah b. Ḥaydah.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.

his good deeds, he will enter hell.[1]

(6) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: One whose exterior prevails over his interior [in terms of goodness and piety], his scale will be light on the Day of Resurrection. One whose interior prevails over his exterior [in terms of goodness and piety], his scale will be heavy on the Day of Resurrection.[2]

Author's comment: There is no problem with the last two narrations in terms of content. However, they are not fit for interpreting the verse in question here [7:8] because they ascribe outweighing to both good deeds and evil deeds. Note that these two narrations make no reference to the verse either [and thus do not claim to be its interpretation].

(7) The Messenger of God said: God created the two pans of the scale like the heaven and the earth. The angels then asked, "Our Lord! Whom shall You weigh with this?" He replied, "I shall weigh with it whomever I will." And God created the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) as sharp as a sword. The angels then asked, "Our Lord! Whom shall You let pass this?" He replied, "I shall let pass it whomever I will."[3]

Author's comment: Apparently what is meant by this tradition is that the scale on the Day of Resurrection will be similar in terms of function to the common scales that we are familiar with in this world, in the sense that it is used to determine the weight of things. There are various narrations in this regard, all of which are meant to simplify the matter to our unsophisticated minds. We shall see this in the narrations below.

(8) Once an atheist asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "Don't you claim that actions will be weighed?" "No," the Imam replied. "Actions are not objects [to be weighed]. They are rather descriptions of one's behavior. In addition, weighing is needed when the person is ignorant of the number, heaviness and lightness of things, but nothing is hidden from God."

The man asked, "So what is meant by the scale (*mīzān*)?"

The Imam replied, "It means [God's] justice."

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *al-Ikhlāṣ*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah. Al-Ḥākim has also reported a similar narration to this in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, on the authority of Salmān.

> The man asked, "What does it [scale] mean in God's Book: *As for those whose scales are heavy* (7:8)?"
> The Imam answered, "[It means] as for those whose [good] deeds prevail."…[1]

Author's comment: This narration confirms our interpretation of weight (*wazn*). A subtle part of the Imam's speech is that actions "are rather descriptions of one's behavior." In other words, when we talk about the weighing of actions in the hereafter, "actions" do not refer to merely physical movements, because these movements are equally found in acts of obedience and disobedience. Instead, they denote the quality, description and classification of these movements according to social contracts and/or religious laws. For instance, the act of sexual intercourse consists of certain physical movements in and of itself. But then it is classified as either "marriage" or "adultery" based on whether or not it complies with social conventions and/or religious legitimacy. Otherwise, both cases consist of the same movements. The Imam's argument is based on two points: (1) Actions are rather qualities and descriptions [of outward movements], and hence they do not have any weight. (2) God is needless of weighing things because He is not ignorant of anything.

One exegete has challenged the above narration as follows:

> Based on the embodiment of actions (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*) in the hereafter, which is a fact, it is perceivable that the virtue of an act would make it heavy. Furthermore, weighing the deeds has many wisdoms, such as deterring those who disobey [in this world], disclosing their sins [in the hereafter], encouraging those who obey [in this world], making them more delighted [in the hereafter], and revealing God's perfect justice. Therefore, the above narration suffers from several problems. If we do not want to reject it we must either assume that it was issued out of *taqiyyah* (precautionary dissimulation),[2] or interpret it in an indirect or figurative way.

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1 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, on the authority of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.

2 *Taqiyyah* means "concealment of one's true beliefs due to fear." Due to unfavorable socio-political conditions during the time of many Imams, they sometimes had to speak in conformity with the dominant views of their time, especially in public meetings, in order to avoid unnecessary difficulties for themselves and/or their followers. (Trans.)

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It should be noted that the above narration does not contradict any of these points. We already had a discussion on the embodiment of deeds, where we said that it is possible that actions may appear in physical forms on the Day of Judgment. It is also possible that God's justice—which is the ultimate judge on that day—may appear in the form of a scale, where the embodied acts would be placed like objects to be weighed. The above narration does not deny these, but it denies the idea of actions being physical objects like the objects in this world, with heaviness and lightness resulting from the force of gravity which pulls toward the earth. Moreover, the above objection is based on the notion that good deeds will be placed on one side of the scale, and evil deeds will be placed on the other, and then the two will be weighed and compared against each other. However, the readers should know by now that there is no basis whatsoever in the verse for this image.

(9) Concerning *As for those whose scales are heavy* (7:8) and *As for those whose scales are light* (7:9) Imam ʿAlī said: It means that good deeds will be used to weigh both good deeds and evil deeds. Good deeds will be heavy on the scale, while evil deeds will be light on the scale.[1]

Author's comment: This narration clearly confirms our interpretation of the verse. It shows that there is a single standard that is used in weighing all deeds. This standard can only be the *ḥaqq* (truth, due justice) of every act.

(10) Hishām b. Sālim says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the verse, *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least* (21:47). He said, "They [the scales of justice] are the prophets and their successors."[2]

Author's comment: The meaning of this hadith should be clear in light of what we explained above. The standard is truth in action and belief, which is found in the prophets and their successors.

(11) A recurrent part of Imam ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn's sermons was: God

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1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Maʿmar al-Saʿdānī.

2 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Minqarī. It is also reported in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Hamdānī, from the Imam, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

addresses sinners and evil-doers in His Book, where He says: *Should a whiff of your Lord's punishment touch them, they will surely say, "Woe to us! We have indeed been wrongdoers!"* (21:46). You might say this is directed at the polytheists, but that is not true, because He says [in the next verse]: *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed We shall produce it and We suffice as reckoners* (21:47). Know, O servants of God, that for the polytheists, neither any scale will be set up, nor any book [of deeds] will be opened. Instead, they will be mustered toward hell in throngs. It is only for people of submission [or Islam] that scales will be set up and books [of deeds] will be opened…[1]

Author's comment: This sermon refers to the verse: *On the Day of Resurrection We will not set for them [the disbelievers] any scale* (18:105).

(12) Concerning verse 7:8 (*The weight [of deeds] on that day is the truth…*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This refers to the retribution of deeds: good for good, and evil for evil.

Author's comment: This interpretation presents the end result [of weighing].

(13) Concerning *because they used to wrong Our signs* (7:9) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [It means] they used to reject the Imams.

Author's comment: This interpretation presents some of the examples and applications of the verse. There are more narrations to the effect of the ones we quoted above.

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab.

Verses 10-25

وَ لَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ جَعَلْنا لَكُمْ فِيها مَعايِشَ قَلِيلاً ما تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾
وَ لَقَدْ خَلَقْناكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْناكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنا لِلْمَلائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلاَّ
إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ ﴿١١﴾ قالَ ما مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قالَ أَنَا
خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نارٍ وَ خَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾ قالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْها فَما يَكُونُ
لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيها فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ قالَ أَنْظِرْنِي إِلى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ
﴿١٤﴾ قالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنْظَرِينَ ﴿١٥﴾ قالَ فَبِما أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِراطَكَ
الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَ عَنْ أَيْمانِهِمْ وَ عَنْ
شَمائِلِهِمْ وَ لا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شاكِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ قالَ اخْرُجْ مِنْها مَذْؤُماً مَدْحُوراً لَمَنْ
تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَ يا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَ زَوْجُكَ
الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُما وَ لا تَقْرَبا هذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٩﴾
فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُما ما وُورِيَ عَنْهُما مِنْ سَوْآتِهِما وَ قالَ ما
نَهاكُما رَبُّكُما عَنْ هذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلاَّ أَنْ تَكُونا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونا مِنَ الْخالِدِينَ
﴿٢٠﴾ وَ قاسَمَهُما إِنِّي لَكُما لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾ فَدَلاَّهُما بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ
بَدَتْ لَهُما سَوْآتُهُما وَ طَفِقا يَخْصِفانِ عَلَيْهِما مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَ ناداهُما رَبُّهُما أَ
لَمْ أَنْهَكُما عَنْ تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَ أَقُلْ لَكُما إِنَّ الشَّيْطانَ لَكُما عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢٢﴾
قالا رَبَّنا ظَلَمْنا أَنْفُسَنا وَ إِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنا وَ تَرْحَمْنا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخاسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾
قالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَ مَتاعٌ إِلى حِينٍ
﴿٢٤﴾ قالَ فِيها تَحْيَوْنَ وَ فِيها تَمُوتُونَ وَ مِنْها تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(7:10) *Certainly We have established you in the earth, and made in it*

[various] means of livelihood for you. Little do you thank.

(7:11) *Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam." So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblīs: he was not among those who prostrated.*

(7:12) *Said He, "What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you?" "I am better than him," he said. "You created me from fire and You created him from clay."*

(7:13) *"Get down from it!" He said. "It is not for you to be arrogant therein. Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones."*

(7:14) *He said, "Respite me till the day they will be resurrected."*

(7:15) *Said He, "You are indeed among the reprieved."*

(7:16) *"As You have consigned me to perversity," he said, "I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path.*

(7:17) *Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful."*

(7:18) *Said He, "Begone hence, blameful, banished! Whoever of them follows you, I will surely fill hell with you all."*

(7:19) *[Then He said to Adam,] "O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof whence you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers."*

(7:20) *Then Satan tempted them, to expose to them what was hidden from them of their shameful parts, and he said, "Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree lest you should become angels, or lest you become immortal."*

(7:21) *And he swore to them, "I am indeed your well-wisher."*

(7:22) *Thus he brought about their fall by deception. So when they tasted of the tree, their shameful parts became exposed to them, and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you that Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?"*

(7:23) *They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves! If You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."*

(7:24) *He said, "Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for some time."*

(7:25) *He said, "In it you will live, and in it you will die; and from it*

you will be raised [from the dead]."

Introduction

These verses discuss the creation of humankind, God's command to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, and their abidance. They also discuss Satan's defiance, his deception of Adam and his wife, their expulsion from the garden, and God's decrees with respect to these events.

Commentary

وَ لَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ جَعَلْنا لَكُمْ فِيها مَعايِشَ قَلِيلاً ما تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(7:10) ***Certainly We have established you*** **(makkanākum, from tamkīn)** ***in the earth, and made in it [various] means of livelihood*** **(maʿāyish)** ***for you. Little do you thank.***

Tamkīn is synonymous with *iskān* and *īṭān* (to give someone residence, to establish someone in a place, to make someone settle somewhere). The meaning is: "We have made the earth your place (*makān*)." Another possible meaning for *tamkīn* is "to give someone power and authority in some territory." This meaning can be confirmed by making a parallel between the current set of verses and a similar account of the story of Adam and Satan in Sūrah al-Baqarah, where the story is preceded by reference to humankind's God-given power and authority in creation: *It is He who created for you all that is in the earth* (2:29).

However, the first meaning is more consonant with what we read below at the end of this story: *On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for some time* (7:24). We can say that what we read in the current verse—*Certainly We have established you in the earth* (7:10)—is a brief description, which is then elaborated in the subsequent verses, until the end of the story of Adam's garden [in verse 7:25].

Maʿāyish is the plural of *maʿīshah*, which means "an instrument or means of living" such as food, drink and so on. The verse's tone and theme is to show two of God's favors upon humankind: (1) giving them dwelling on the earth (or giving them power and authority in it); and (2) providing them with various means of livelihood. That is why the verse ends by saying: *Little do you thank*.

وَ لَقَدْ خَلَقْناكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْناكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنا لِلْمَلائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلاَّ

إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ ﴿١١﴾

(7:11) ***Certainly* (la-qad)** ***We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam." So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblīs: he was not among those who prostrated.***

The story of Adam starts here, until verse 25. These verses expound on the concise version of humankind's creation mentioned in the last verse, and explain how humankind ended up being established in the earth, as we read: *Certainly We have established you in the earth, and made in it [various] means of livelihood* (7:10). That is why the verse starts with the letter *lām*, indicating a vow for emphasis (called *lām al-qasam*).[1] Likewise, the two stories mentioned in these verses—that is, the story of commanding the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, and the story of Adam's garden—are presented in a single thread, as opposed to being separated into two accounts. Otherwise, the two stories are really independent of one another, but they are merged together because this way the brief introduction mentioned in the last verse—*Certainly We have established you in the earth…* (7:10)—matches the conclusion of the two stories joined together: *He said, "Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode…"* (7:24-25).

Certainly We created you, then We formed you…: This verse is addressed to all humankind, with a tone of describing God's favor upon them, just like the last verse. The two verses pursue the same theme, with the difference that the current verse elaborates on the concise account of the last. Hence, the verse begins with a universal address to all humankind: *Certainly We created you, then We formed you*, but then it switches to a particular statement about Adam as a specific person: *then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam."* We can infer two points from this transition:

(i) The prostration of the angels was in fact directed toward all humankind as children of Adam. Adam was set up as a *qiblah* (direction) for their prostration. He was a representative of the entire human race, presented to the angels on behalf of all humans. He was much like the Kaʿbah, which is

1 The connection is that the letter *lām* (lit. certainly, indeed) conveys a sense of justification and explanation. In other words, it shows that what follows next is an explanation for what was mentioned before. (Trans.)

set as a *qiblah*. Facing the Kaʿbah in worship symbolizes facing the Lord. Therefore, their prostration was not made to Adam as a specific individual.

There are three Qur'anic proofs for this idea—that Adam is a representative of all humankind in the story of the prostration: (1) Verses 2:30-33, where the angels are commanded to prostrate before Adam *because* of his position of *khilāfah* (successorship, vicegerency). The *khilāfah* mentioned there [in verse 2:30] is not something exclusive to Adam, but it is common to all humankind, as we explained under the verses. Therefore, the consequent prostration would also pertain to all humankind. (2) Below we read that Satan (Iblīs) says: *As You have consigned me to perversity I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear…* (7:16-17). In these verses, the plural pronouns refer to all humans, without the intermediation of Adam, and without any explicit reference to humankind in the previous verses. A similar reference to them [through plural pronouns] is found in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, where Satan says: *My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize [evil] for them on the earth, and I will surely pervert them all* (15:39). Likewise, in Sūrah Ṣād he says: *By Your might, I will surely pervert them all* (38:82). Clearly if the prostration of the angels were not made to *all* humankind, it would not make sense for Satan to demonstrate such outright hostility against them all. (3) God addresses Adam [and Eve] in Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah Ṭā-Hā [verses 2:38 and 20:123], while He makes the same address to the children of Adam in the current chapter, where He says: *O Children of Adam! If there come to you messengers from among yourselves* (7:35).[1]

(ii) The creation of Adam is tantamount to the creation of all humankind. This can also be inferred from the following verses: *And He commenced the creation of man from clay. Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid* (32:7-8); *It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of [seminal] fluid, then from a clinging mass* (40:67). These verses suggest that creation from dust pertains to the creation of Adam [while his descendants were not directly created from dust]. This point can also be deduced from another account of this story in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ,

1 Verse 20:123 starts with a dual pronoun—corresponding to Adam and Eve—but it continues with a plural pronoun. Verse 2:38 also uses a plural pronoun. Given verse 7:35, these plural pronouns most likely refer to all humankind (that is, Adam, Eve and their progeny). (Trans.)

where Satan says to God: *If You respite me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely harness his [Adam's] progeny, [all] except a few* (17:62). There is also some allusion to this point where God says: *When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves…* (7:172ff), as we shall discuss below.

Other exegetes have offered a variety of interpretations for this verse. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: "God continues in this verse to describe His blessings [upon His servants] at the beginning of [their] creation: *Certainly We created you, then* (thumma) *We formed you* (7:11)." Then it provides a list of interpretations for the word *thumma* (lit. then) in this verse:

(1) According to al-Akhfash, the word *thumma* is synonymous with the letter *wāw* (lit. and) in this verse.

(2) Al-Zajjāj has objected to al-Akhfash by saying that this is a mistake that is not permitted by al-Khalīl, Sībawayh and all reliable scholars [of Arabic grammar]. Instead, *thumma* is exclusively used to introduce an event that occurs *after* what is mentioned before the term.[1] What is meant in this verse is: "We first created Adam, and then We fashioned him." In other words, God began the creation of Adam from dust, and then applied a form to it afterwards. This is the meaning of *We created you, then We formed you*. Once Adam was created, *then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"* (7:11). This interpretation is narrated from al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī]. It is common among Arabs to say, "We did this to you" when what they mean is, "We did this to your fathers." Likewise we read in the Qur'an [addressing the Jews]: *And when We took a pledge from you, and raised the Mount above you* (2:63), which means, "We took a pledge from your ancestors."

(3) The verse means: "We created Adam, then We formed you in his loins, then We told the angels: Prostrate to Adam." This is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, al-Rabīʿ, Qatādah and al-Suddī.

(4) The sequence in the verse [inferred from the word *thumma* (then)] pertains to the sequence of God's *report* of the events [not the *occurrence* of the events]. The meaning is: "We created you, then We formed you, then *We inform you that* We said to

1 In other words, *thumma* marks a temporal separation between what is mentioned before and after it. (Trans.)

the angels: Prostrate before Adam."[1] This is like when someone says, "I am walking, then (*thumma*) I am speeding."[2] This is how several scholars of [Arabic] grammar have interpreted the verse, such as ʿAlī b. ʿĪsá, Qāḍī Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī and others.

(5) Following the same notion [that *thumma* sometimes indicates a sequence of expression, not a sequence of occurrence], some exegetes have interpreted the verse as follows: "We created you in the loins of men, and (*thumma*)[3] We formed you in the wombs of women." This is narrated from ʿIkrimah.

(6) Another similar interpretation is: "We created you in the wombs, and (*thumma*) We formed you by opening ears, eyes and other organs [for you]."

(End of quote from *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.)

There are two problems with the interpretation narrated from al-Zajjāj [number 2]:

(1) In order to attribute the acts of fathers to their children, there must be some common quality between the two groups to validate the attribution. A mere blood tie is not sufficient for merging the two groups in one category. The fact that all humans are the descendants of Adam does not suffice to count Adam's creation as theirs. Instead, their creation must be somehow incorporated in Adam's.

(2) Granted that the creation and formation of Adam counts as the creation and formation of his descendants, it follows that commanding the angels to prostrate to Adam is equivalent to commanding them to prostrate to his descendants. Therefore, the verse should have been similar to the verse: *And when We took a pledge from you, and raised the Mount above you* (2:63). However, the verse does not tel the angles, "Prostrate before *humans*," but it says: *"Prostrate before Adam"* (7:11).

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1 According to this interpretation, only the second *thumma* pertains to God's report of the event, but the first *thumma* pertains to the occurrence of the event. (Trans.)

2 In expressions like this, *thumma* means "rather." The meaning is: "I am walking; rather I am speeding." It could also mean "and": "I am walking and speeding." Put simply: "I am walking fast." (Trans.)

3 In this interpretation, and the next one, *thumma* can also mean "then," indicating the temporal sequence of events, which is the most apparent and primary meaning of the term. (Trans.)

As with the interpretations narrated after that, they are all weak possibilities without any textual evidence from the verse. Those who have offered these views would certainly not consent to their own speech being interpreted as such, so how come they have interpreted the most eloquent speech in this way?!

… So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblīs: he was not among those who prostrated: All angels prostrated, which is mentioned explicitly in the verse: *Thereat the angels prostrated, all of them together* (15:30). The verse excludes Iblīs (Satan, the Devil) from the list. God explains the reason for his noncompliance elsewhere: *He [Iblīs] was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command* (18:50). However, concerning the angels God says: *Rather, they are [His] honoured servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27).

These verses clearly show that Iblīs was not of the same kind as the angels. This has led to a controversy among the scholars. Some have suggested that the command to the angels also included Iblīs, but only the angels are mentioned based on generalization (*taghlīb*),[1] since the angels were greater in number and higher in status. This way, we can maintain the exception in the verse as a connected exception.[2] Others have suggested that Iblīs was commanded separately, meaning that God made two commands: one to the angels, and one to Iblīs, even though the following verse suggests that God made only one command. He holds Iblīs accountable for the same command addressed to the angels: *What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you?* (7:12). Given this interpretation [that there were two commands], the exception in the verse would be an unconnected exception.

Based on Qur'anic evidence, we can say that Iblīs was with the angels, without any distinction between them. They were all united in the station of *quds* (sanctity), as it can be inferred from the story of [Adam's] *khilāfah* (successorship, vicegerency) in the Qur'an: *When your Lord said to the*

1 *Taghlīb* is when a mixed group is entirely described by the quality of *some* of them, even though that quality does not apply to *all* of them. (Trans.)

2 A "connected exception" (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*) is an ordinary exception, where what is excepted is a member of the original group. Its opposite is "unconnected exception" (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*, *istithnāʾ munfaṣil*), where what is excepted is not a member of the original group. Such exception effectively conveys two independent statements. (Trans.)

angels, "Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth," they said, "Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?" (2:30). The command to prostrate before Adam was directed at that *station*, including anyone positioned in it. Therefore the audience of the command included anyone at that level, based on the *position* that they held. There is some reference to this station in what we shall read below, where God says to Iblīs: *"Get down from it! It is not for you to be arrogant therein"* (7:13). The pronouns "it" and "therein" refer to either his position (*manzilah*), or the celestial realm (*samāʾ*), or the garden [of Adam]—which all reduce to his spiritual station and status. If the command were made to the audience [that is, the angels and Iblīs] irrespective of their station, the verse should have said, "It is not for you to be arrogant" [without qualifying it by "therein"].

Given the above explanations, there was no difference between Iblīs and the angels before the command to prostrate to Adam, but afterwards they divided into two groups. On the one hand, there were the angels who persisted with the same station and position that they had, which consisted of humble servitude before the Truth and obedience to God's command. This defines the reality of the angels' life and the kind of acts they perform, as God describes them: *Rather, they are [His] honoured servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27). On the other hand, there was Iblīs, who left the station that he previously shared with the angels. God says: *He [Iblīs] was one of the jinn, so he transgressed* (fa-fasaqa, from fisq) *against his Lord's command* (18:50). The original usage of the word *fisq* is when a date comes out of its sheath. In like manner, an essential property of the path chosen by Iblīs was coming out of his divine position of servitude and obedience. He differentiated himself from the angels by opting for such a life.

The Qur'an has depicted this story in a way that mimics a human interaction between a ruler and his subjects. It talks about things like command, compliance, defiance, argument, expulsion and eviction. However, based on our explanation above and the verses that we quoted, we can see that these are symbolic expressions for a transcendent reality in the world of creation. What is meant is that Iblīs (Satan, the Devil) did not comply to humble himself before the reality and essence of humankind. This was a disobedience on his part, given the [spiritual and existential] station that he had. We can deduce this from God's address to him: *It is*

not for you to be arrogant therein (7:13). In other words, it was fundamentally incompatible with his station [indicated by "therein" in verse 7:13] to be arrogant. Hence, his arrogance was tantamount to exiting that level and falling to abyss.

We also explained that there was only a single command which was addressed to both the angels and Iblīs [on the account of their common station]. However, the angels are created in a way that their existence is fixed on obedience and good. This means that they do not face the option to obey or disobey. These two choices are not equally open to them, which means that they are not subject to legislative (*tashrīʿī*) and authoritative (*mawlawī*) commands. From this we can infer a similar, but opposite, point about the creation and existence of Iblīs: his essence is characterized by disobedience.

Had it not been for God's creation of Adam, and His command to the angels and Iblīs to prostrate before him, Iblīs would have remained in his station of divine proximity without any distinction from the angels. However, the creation of Adam split that station into two: the station of proximity [to God], versus the station of distance [from God]. Thus it resulted in two paths: the path of happiness, and the path of wretchedness.

قالَ ما مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نارٍ وَ خَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾

(7:12) ***Said He, "What prevented you* (manaʿaka, from manʿ)** ***from* (an-lā)** ***prostrating, when I commanded you?" "I am better than him," he said. "You created me from fire and You created him from clay."***

In Sūrah Ṣād we read: *He said, "O Iblīs! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands?"* (38:75), where the verse does not include the negative particle *lā* after the particle *an*. That is why some exegetes have said that the negative particle *lā* is is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty) in this verse, added only for emphasis. Hence, the meaning is: "What prevented you from prostrating?"[1] Another example of an extra *lā* is the verse: *So that the People of the*

1 If we include the negative particle *lā* in the meaning, the verse would be saying: "What prevented you from *not* prostrating?" which is clearly not the intended meaning in the verse, especially given verse 38:75. A similar extra *lā* is found in verses 20:92-93. (Trans.)

Book may (li-an-lā) *know that they have no power over anything of Allah's grace* (57:29).[1] However, it is more appropriate to say that the negative *lā* indicates an implied omitted verb—like *ḥaml* (to make someone do something) or *daʿá* (to provoke)—which is implicitly included in the verb *manʿ* (to prevent). The meaning would be: "What was the stumbling block which made you—or instigated you—to not prostrate?"

… "I am better than him," he said. "You created me from fire and You created him from clay.": This is the answer of the cursed Satan to God. It expresses his first sin; rather, the first disobedience of God. All other sins can be analyzed and reduced to a similar claim of egoism and conceit, where one assumes some greatness for oneself before the grandeur of God. However, all greatness belongs to Him, and He has no partner in that. Since everything is humbled before God; the entire world of existence is subservient to Him; all heads bow down in submission to Him; and all voices are calmed before Him—a servant that is created by God is in no position to say "I" before God's existence.

Satan's problem was that he looked only at himself and saw his being alone, as an independent entity. He failed to look up and see the Lord Who is standing above him, and Who keeps him [and all beings] on their feet. Had he done that, his sense of selfhood and ego would have dissolved completely, such that he would no longer feel any greatness or independent existence in himself. Then, with his soul humbled, he would have submitted to God and obeyed His command willingly. In that case, instead of seeing himself as better than Adam because of being created of fire as opposed to clay, he would only concern himself with the command that had been issued from the source and origin of all beauty, majesty, magnificence and grandeur.

From a grammatical point of view, if Satan's answer were to be commensurate with God's question—*What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you*—he should have said: "What prevented me was that I am better than him (*manaʿanī annī khayr minhu*)." But instead he said: *I am better than him*. This subtle difference highlights Satan's sense of ego, and also shows that this was something established and persistent in him.[2] This is an important point, because it shows that Satan's arrogance

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1 Translated literally (including the negative particle *lā*) the verse would mean: "So that the People of the Book may *not* know…" (Trans.)

2 *Manaʿanī annī khayr minhu* is a verbal sentence (*fiʿliyyah*) which proves only

was against God, not against Adam.

Given Satan's answer, what prevented him from prostration was his impression of being "better": *I am better than him*. Nothing shows arrogance more clearly and strongly than saying that "I am better."

The sentence, "I am better than him," he said. "You created me from fire and You created him from clay" shows that Satan's proof for being better than Adam was that he was created from fire while Adam was created from clay. God says in the Qur'an that Satan was one of the jinn: *He [Iblīs] was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command* (18:50); and the jinn were created from fire: *Certainly We created man out of a dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud, and We created the jinn earlier out of a piercing fire* (15:26-27); *He created man out of dry clay, like the potter's, and created the jinn out of a flame of a fire* (55:14-15). Therefore, God confirms that Satan was created from fire. However, God does not confirm Satan's claim to superiority over Adam. He does not reject this claim here, but the story of *khilāfah* (successorship, vicegerency) in Sūrah al-Baqarah [verses 2:30ff] clearly show the merit of Adam over Satan and the angels.

The same story is mentioned elsewhere as follows: *When your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him." Thereat the angels prostrated, all of them together, but not Iblīs; he acted arrogantly and he was one of the faithless. He said, "O Iblīs! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands? Are you arrogant, or are you [one] of the exalted ones?" "I am better than him," he said. "You created me from fire and You created him from clay"* (38:71-76). These verses show that the angels were not ordered to prostrate to Adam due to his earthly and material creation. Rather, they were told to prostrate to him after he was proportioned and received the divine spirit. "My spirit" here is an honorific ascription to the divine; it shows that the human spirit has a unique status and a very special position in the sight of God. In the world of creation, nothing has any merit of its own, but it is only one's position with respect to God which determines who is better.

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a *single occurrence* of the verb ("to prevent") in the past. However, *I am better than him* is a nominal sentence (*ismiyyah*) without a verb in Arabic. Thus it indicates that the predicate ("am better than him") is established for the subject *across time*. (Trans.)

In addition, God reprimands Iblīs by asking him: *What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands?* (38:75). Using one's "both hands" to create something show's the Maker's utmost degree of attention and regard for that thing—irrespective of how we interpret the "two hands" of God. This is, in turn, a merit for Adam. In response to this question, however, Satan ignored his arrogance against God, and only referred to their initial substance of fire and clay: *I am better than him. You created me from fire and You created him from clay* (38:76). Similarly, in the current chapter God asks him: *What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you?* This question shows that Satan's problem was being arrogant against his Lord [not against Adam], since he did not comply with God's command. But again, we see that he pays no attention to explaining the reason behind his arrogance against God, as he only says: *I am better than him…*

This sentence—*I am better than him*—is in a sense related to Satan's arrogance against God, because it implies a claim to an independent existence for him against God's absolute existence which overshadows all beings. This sense of independence was what led Satan to forget God's grandeur, and instead assume a similar position for himself irrespective of his Lord. It was incumbent on him to obey God *because He is God*, but Satan overlooked this reality due to viewing himself as an independent entity. As a result, he assessed the two options available to him, and decided that disobedience is better than obedience, that transgression is preferred to submission. The root cause of all this was his proud assumption of some independence in existence for himself. That blinded him from seeing the truth, and led him to reason [for himself] that his origin of fire is better than Adam's origin of clay, and it is not right for the superior to humble himself before the inferior through prostration, even if God commands him to do so. Satan ignored God's command because he saw himself equal to God and parallel to Him in terms of independence and greatness. Thus he overlooked the Commander and decided to assess the two sides of the command.

The point is that God is the Origin and End of all things. His command is either His very act of creation, or it reduces to His creation and existentiation (*takwīn*). Therefore, if He creates something and decrees some merit for it, then that thing will have the merit in reality and the fact of the matter. Likewise, if He creates something and orders it to humble

itself before the first being, it means that the second being is less perfect than the first one in terms of existence. His word is the truth; and it is incumbent that His order is obeyed because it is *His* order, not because of any interest, benefit or consideration (*maslahah*) that it involves. Otherwise, God would be stripped of His lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and authority (*mawlawiyyah*), and would make considerations of interests and benefits central to everything. Since those considerations and benefits pertain to His creatures, that would set God on par with the other things.[1]

Putting together all verses about this story, we can conclude that the root cause behind Stan's sin was his arrogant defiance against God's command, which qualified him for God's curse [that is, his expulsion from his station of divine proximity]. Satan expressed his pride by saying: *I am better than him [Adam]*. He deemed himself better than Adam, and viewed Adam to be an abject being. However, Adam was chosen by God. God had notified the angels and Satan about Adam's superiority over them in the story of *khilāfah* [verses 2:30ff], and also through expressions like: *when I breathe into him of My spirit* (38:72) and: *I created him with My [own] two hands* (38:75). Hence, Satan was certainly arrogant against Adam, but as we explained above, what underlay his behavior was arrogance against God. What is central to this story in the Qur'an is Satan's pride against God, not his pride against Adam. We can see this in the verse: *When We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam," they prostrated, but not Iblīs. He was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command* (18:50). Note that the verse does not say, "He refused to humble himself before Adam" but it only refers to his transgression against God's command.[2]

To summarize, the verses about this story are primarily concerned with Satan's arrogant defiance against his Lord. His arrogance against

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1 This is based on the view that God's commands are not arbitrary or merely conventional (called *iʿtibārī*), but they are based on some reality in the world of existence (called *ḥaqīqī*). Our laws are based on social contract and convention, while His laws are based on the relative position of different entities on the graded chain of existence. This is the reason why "it is incumbent that His order is obeyed because it is *His* order," and also the reason why *He is not questioned concerning what He does* (21:23). *That is because Allah is the Truth* (22:6, 22:62, 31:30); *The truth is from your Lord* (2:147, 3:60). (Trans.)

2 In other words, *he transgressed against his Lord's command* (18:50) is used interchangeably for "he refused to prostrate." This shows their equivalence. (Trans.)

Adam and his arguments to this effect are rather the consequences and implications of this root problem. This seems to be the reason why God does not give any direct answer to Satan's justification [that *I am better than him…*]. There is only some allusion to this matter in certain verses, such as: *when I breathe into him of My spirit* (38:72) and: *I created him with My [own] two hands* (38:75).

Objection: According to the above interpretation, the command to prostrate before Adam was a *takwīnī* (existential, creational, causal) order. This, however, contradicts the idea of Satan's "sin" and "disobedience" because disobedience is only applicable with respect to *tashrīʿī* (legislative, imperative) orders. God's *takwīnī* command results in the inevitable creation and occurrence of the event. If His *takwīnī* will is applied to any event, then it is impossible for it not to occur. He says: *All that We say to a thing, when We will it, is to say to it "Be!" and it is* (16:40).

Response: As we explained above, even though this story is expressed in a way that mimics common human interactions—including command, compliance, disobedience, expulsion and so on—it represents existential and creational realities that exist between humankind, the angels and the Devil. In other words, the story explains the creation and makeup of the angels and Satan, which have some relationship with humankind. It shows us the inherent inclinations of each side [the angels and Satan] with respect to human happiness and misery. This, however, does not mean that the command to prostrate before Adam was a *takwīnī* command.

This is the story of creation, expressed in a worldly picture, based on social interactions that we are accustomed to. It resembles a king who observes one of his subjects to have a special aptitude and capacity for growth, so he chooses him for himself, pays exclusive attention to him, makes him his vicegerent in his territory, and gives him priority over his courtiers. The king commands his courtiers to respect the special subject's position and be in his service. Most of them respond positively to this call and obey the king, which makes him pleased with them and lets them maintain their position. One of them, however, refuses to obey on the account that the king was wrong to make that directive. He argues that he is higher than the chosen subject in terms of inherent worth and record of service. As a result, the king is enraged by him, expels him from his court, and brands him with humiliation and dishonor. The reason is that [in a context of absolute monarchy,] a king is to obeyed because he is

the central authority, the affairs are in his hands, and all commands issue from him, not because of his commands corresponding with some real benefit, interest or consideration. The latter corresponds to an advisor or counsellor whose job is to show others the way to [their] good and growth.

In this analogy, the courtiers of the king—including those who obey his command and the one who does not—are all positioned at the same level of proximity, honor and presence, without any distinction between them. Then, after receiving the king's command, their ways branch into two and they form two groups: (1) a group that is obedient and docile; and (2) a group that is disobedient and proud. The command also provides the grounds for the king to manifest his will, his power, and some of his hidden qualities. As a result, he shows mercy to some, and wrath to others; he brings some near to himself, and expels others from himself; he pardons and forgives some, and captures and avenges others; he encourages obedience with good promise, and discourages disobedience with threat; he rewards those who obey, and punishes those who disobey. Events like this can be compared to a touchstone that is applied to a metal to determine how genuine it is in reality.

The story of the angels' prostration and Satan's refusal represents certain realities that can be compared to the above picture. The command to prostrate before Adam represents God's honoring Adam with the station of divine proximity, divine *khilāfah* (successorship, vicegerency), and divine *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority, mastership). The angels submitted to this honorable position of Adam, while Iblīs turned away from it because he was inherently opposed to human perfection and felicity. For this reason, whenever he comes in contact with humankind, he causes mischief for them; and whenever he approaches them, he leads them astray: *About him [Satan] it has been decreed that should anyone take him for a friend, he will lead him astray* (22:4).

God's act of creation and giving existence (*takwīn*) is mentioned in several verses in the form of a verbal order or a similar form, such as: *And He said to it [the heaven] and to the earth, "Come! Willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come willingly"* (41:11); *Indeed We presented the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were apprehensive of it* (33:72). This is expressed in the most comprehensive way in the verse: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is* (36:82).

Objection: We cannot renounce the apparent form of the story and interpret it as merely pointing to some aspect of the creation [of Adam, Satan and the angels], because that would subject the Qur'an to ambiguity and subjective interpretations. If we sanction such interpretation in this story, then other teachings of the Qur'an—about God and the hereafter, as well as all Qur'anic stories, lessons and laws—may be taken to be figurative as well. That would completely destroy the religion.

Response: We follow wherever evidence takes us. In some cases we have evidence [from the Qur'an, sunnah and reason] that the apparent and literal meaning of the text is intended, as in the case of the principle beliefs, the primary teachings of the Qur'an, the stories of the past prophets with their people, legal rulings, and their subsequent rewards and punishments. In some other cases, we have evidence against a literal meaning, such as the current story of discussion, as well as the realm of pre-existence (*ʿālam al-dharr*) [in verses 7:172-174] and the offering of divine covenant to the beings [in verse 33:72]. In these cases we can opt for a symbolic interpretation [referring to a reality about God's creation] as long as it does not contravene an essential religious belief, a decisive verse, an authentic tradition (sunnah), or a proven rational argument.

Satan's argument for not prostrating to Adam was: *I am better than him. You created me from fire and You created him from clay*. This is a case of *qiyās* (reasoning by analogy, comparison), which is an argument not based on certainty, but based on probabilistic personal opinion. Such arguments are not strong enough to prove any fact. Exegetes have discussed many points to show why his argument was flawed, but as we explained above, the Qur'an does not address this issue. Instead, God reprimands him for showing arrogant defiance in a position that was only compatible with submission and compliance. That is why we will skip the discussions of the exegetes in this regard.

قالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْها فَما يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيها فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

(7:13) ***"Get down from it!" He said. "It is not for you to be arrogant* (tatakabbara, from takabbur) *therein. Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones* (al-ṣāghirīn)."**

Takabbur means "assuming greatness for oneself and expressing it to someone else." *Kibar* (greatness, bigness, grandeur) and *ṣighar* (smallness, littleness, insignificance) are relative qualities which are usually used for

non-physical matters. If one says or does something which implies that he is better and more important than another person, then he is counting himself great and the other side small. This is called *takabbur*. If any being has any advantage or significance with respect to another being, it is through a quality that is due to God and from Him. This means that no one is entitled to express greatness of oneself (*takabbur*) except God. Hence, this is one of the exclusive attributes of God, Who is absolutely Great and Superior [to the entire existence]. Therefore, we can classify two types of *takabbur* (arrogance, pride): (1) rightful and praiseworthy pride, which belongs to God or traces to Him in some way, such as acting proudly against the enemies of God, for that is in reality seeking superiority from God; (2) wrong and blameworthy pride, which is found among others, where they claim some baseless greatness and significance for themselves.

Ṣāghirīn is the plural of *ṣāghir* (abased, degraded, humiliated), which is derived from *ṣaghār*, meaning "abasement and dishonor." *Ṣaghār* is like *ṣighar* (smallness, littleness, insignificance), except that the former is used as a non-physical attribute, while the latter is used as a physical property. The humiliation mentioned here was Satan's penalty for being arrogant. The last statement in the verse—*Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones*—interprets and emphasizes the first sentence: *Get down* (fa-ihbiṭ, from hubūṭ) *from it*. *Hubūṭ* means "to descend and go down from one's position." Therefore, Satan's *hubūṭ* (descent, relegation) was not a physical movement from one location to another, but it was a spiritual descent to a lower status. This confirms what we said previously—that the pronouns "from it" and "therein" refer to Satan's position of divine proximity, not the heavens or the garden, unless the heavens and the garden are also meant in a spiritual sense.

The meaning is: God said to Satan, "Get down from your station because you did not prostrate when I ordered you. This is a station of humbleness and submission to Me. You are in no position to show pride here. Thus, you must leave, for indeed you are among those who are degraded and abased."

قَالَ أَنظِرْنِي إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنظَرِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(7:14-15) ***He said, "Respite me till the day they will be resurrected." Said He, "You are indeed among the reprieved."***

Here Satan asks for a deferral [of his judgment and punishment], and

God gives him respite. The Qur'an has discussed this more elaborately elsewhere: *He said, "My Lord! Respite me till the day they will be resurrected." Said He, "You are indeed among the reprieved until the day of the known time"* (38:79-81). These verses show that God did not grant Satan's wish in the unconditional way that he requested. He did not respite Satan until the Day of Resurrection, but appointed a term before then, called "the day of the known time." We shall discuss this, by the will of God, in Sūrah al-Ḥijr [under verses 15:36-38].

Satan asked for his term to be extended until the Day of Resurrection, which means that he wanted to be able to deceive and tempt humankind throughout their existence in this world and the *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this life and the Resurrection). However, God did not grant his wish all the way to the Resurrection. Instead, He only gave Satan freedom to operate until the end of this life, but not during the *barzakh*. Hence, Satan cannot deceive and tempt the people after their death, although he may be with some people in the realms after this world as a mate and companion, as we can infer from these verses: *Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-Merciful, We assign him a devil who remains his companion. Indeed they bar them from the way while they suppose that they are [rightly] guided. When he comes to Us, he will say, "I wish there had been between me and you the distance between east and west! What an evil companion [you are]!" "Today that will be of no avail to you. As you did wrong, so will you share in the punishment"* (43:36-39). This is also what is apparently meant [by "mates"] in the verse: *Muster the wrongdoers and their mates and what they used to worship* (37:22).

قالَ فَبِما أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِراطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَ عَنْ أَيْمانِهِمْ وَ عَنْ شَمائِلِهِمْ وَ لا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شاكِرِينَ﴿١٧﴾

(7:16-17) ***"As You* (fa-bi-mā) *have consigned me to perversity* (aghwaytanī, from ighwāʾ),"** ***he said, "I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful."***

Ighwāʾ is to "cast someone into *ghayy*," where *ghayy* (which is

synonymous with *ghawāyah*) means "error, loss, failure and destruction." Exegetes have suggested all of these meanings for *ghayy* in Satan's statement: *As You have consigned me to perversity*. However, what is meant here by *ghayy* is the first meaning [that is, error], based on a similar verse in Sūrah al-Ḥijr: *He [Satan] said, "My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity* (aghwaytanī)*, I will surely glamorize [evil] for them on the earth, and I will surely pervert them* (la-ughwiyannahum) *all*" (15:39).[1]

The letter *bā'* in *fa-bi-mā* indicates either causality or reciprocation. It means: "Because of You casting me into error, I will surely lie in wait…" or "In return to Your casting me into error, I will surely lie in wait…" Some exegetes have suggested that the letter *bā'* here indicates a vow, but this is not correct. Apparently they said this in order to match the current verse with what Satan says elsewhere [with a vow]: *He said, "By Your might, I will surely pervert them all*" (38:82).

… I will surely lie in wait* (la-aqʿudanna, from quʿūd) *for them on Your straight path: What is meant here by the verb *quʿūd* (lit. to sit) is to constantly be present on the path and wait in ambush there in order to lead astray those who travel on this way. The meaning is: "I will surely sit for them [that is, to abduct and despoil them] on Your straight path, which is the level way that leads them to You and to their happiness." Everyone is necessarily on a journey to God and pursues His straight path [according to their initial makeup and innate nature].

Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left…: This is what Satan will do to the people as he lies in wait on the straight path. He approaches them from all four sides which surround them. The path where Satan lies in ambush for the people is not a physical path, but a spiritual one. Therefore, the sides from which he approaches people are also immaterial, not physical. We can infer these sides from the other verses in the Qur'an about what Satan does: *He makes them promises and gives them [false] hopes, yet Satan does not promise them anything but delusion* (4:120); *That is only Satan frightening his followers* (3:175); *and do not follow in Satan's steps* (2:168); *Satan frightens*

1 In verse 15:39 Satan says to God, "Because You cast me into *ghayy*, I will cast humankind into *ghayy*." What Satan does to humankind is that he misleads them and casts them into error. Therefore, since the word appears in the verse twice in apparently the same meaning, what Satan effectively meant was to accuse God for his error. (Trans.)

you of poverty and prompts you to [commit] indecent acts (2:268). Given these and many other similar verses, we can say:

(1) "Their front" refers to future events that lie ahead of them in this life, such as: (a) their hopes and desires which they like to achieve; (b) the pleasures which they seek; (c) the difficulties which they fear and wish to avoid, like becoming poor due to spending in the way of God, or being blamed by others due to entering a certain path—which is in reality good and praiseworthy.[1]

(2) "Their rear" refers to their children and descendants. People tend to have certain hopes and fears with respect to their children, who will remain and live after them. People effectively feel that they will live indefinitely in this world, because they imagine themselves living through their children. Therefore, they find the pleasure and pain of their children to be their own pleasure and pain. This motivates them to accumulate wealth and make all preparations for them through any means possible, whether lawful or unlawful. But by so doing, they kill themselves for the sake of their children.

(3) "Their right (*yamīn*)" means what is auspicious (*maymūn*) and conducive to their [true and eternal] happiness, which is religion. Satan makes it appealing to them to exaggerate in certain religious acts, and to impose on themselves certain practices that have not been commanded by God. This is what God calls "following the footsteps of Satan."[2]

(4) "Their left" is the opposite of "their right"; it refers to Satan decorating indecency and wrong in the eyes of people. He tempts them to disobey God, commit sins, and pursue their desires.

Al-Zamakhsharī says in *al-Kashshāf*:

> You might ask about the difference between the two prepositions used in this verse, where the verse uses *min* (from) for "front" and "back" but *ʿan* (from) for "right" and "left."
>
> The answer is that both prepositions are used to introduce the place or location of the verb "come" in the verse. There is more than one preposition used to introduce the place where a verb occurs (called *mafʿūl fīhi*), just as there is more than one preposition used to make a verb transitive and introduce its object (called

1 For example, deciding to dedicate one's life to pursuing the path of religious knowledge, or to waging jihad in God's way. (Trans.)

2 See verses 2:168, 2:208, 6:142, 24:21. (Trans.)

> *mafʿūl bihi*). We should take these from how Arabs employ their language; these things are not open to comparison and logical inference. We can only discuss whether a preposition is used properly or not [according to the common usage and convention of Arabs].
>
> For instance, the verb "sit" is used with two prepositions: (1) "he sat ʿ*alā* (over) his right"; and (2) "he sat ʿ*an* (by) his right." The former is used when someone sits on the right side of someone in a way that he has a dominant position over him and overshadows him. The latter is used when the person sits next to a person with some distance between them, without touching him. However, due to frequent usage, the latter is also used in other meanings [where there is no distance between the two individuals]. This is similar to the word *taʿāl*, which we discussed before.[1]

… and You will not find most of them to be grateful: Here Satan states the outcome of what he is planning to do with humankind: *I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them…* (7:16-17). Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God describes this in a different way. Instead of saying *and You will not find most of them to be grateful*, Satan says: *Do You see this one whom You have honoured above me? If You respite me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely destroy his progeny, [all] except a few* (17:62). As we see, there too Satan excludes "a few" from his temptation and deception, much like what we see in the current verse. In two other places Satan says: *I will surely pervert them all, except Your chosen servants among them* (15:39-40, 38:82-83).

Matching these verses shows that "the grateful" (*al-shākirīn*) in the current verse are the same as "the chosen ones" (*al-mukhlaṣīn*) [in verses 15:40 and 38:83]. We can indeed confirm this if we deeply reflect on what the two terms mean. *Mukhlaṣūn* are those who are purely dedicated to God and exclusively chosen by Him. This means that their servitude and

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1 The entire quotation from al-Zamakhsharī pertains purely to the Arabic of the verse. His point is that even though two different prepositions are used in the verse (*min* and ʿ*an*), they convey the same meaning. *Taʿāl* literally means "come up, ascend" in the imperative, and was originally used to call someone when the caller was in a higher position. Notwithstanding its provenance, it was later used to simply mean "come," which is what it means nowadays and is also what it means in the Qur'an. (Trans.)

worship are only for God, without associating any partners with Him whatsoever. No one other than God has any share of them. All they care about is God; they have forgotten everything and everyone other than their Lord, including themselves. There is nothing in their heart other than God. They lack the required medium for Satan and his temptations.

Shākirūn are those in whom the quality of gratefulness is rooted and established.[1] Whenever they use anything, they express—verbally and practically—that what they have is from their Lord, Who has blessed them with that bounty. This is the meaning of gratefulness. As a result, they are constantly mindful of their Lord in their dealings with anything, including themselves and others. They see every being as a possession of God in its entirety, without having any independent control over any aspect of its existence. This is their mind-set before, during, and after they deal with anything or anyone. Since they are mindful of their Lord in such a manner, they have no room to be mindful of others. After all: *Allah has not put two hearts within any man* (33:4).

Given the above explanations, if we analyze the true meaning of the two terms, "the grateful" (*al-shākirīn*) are the same as "the chosen ones" (*al-mukhlaṣīn*), who are necessarily exempt from Satan's deceptions and temptations. He has no way to mislead them because they lie outside his purview. Therefore, the exclusion of these people from Satan's temptations is based on their real characteristics, not based on some decision by Satan who could have decided otherwise. It is not a favor and kindness of Satan to some humans.

Satan said to the Almighty God: *As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path… and You will not find most of them to be grateful* (7:16-17). He said that he will assault humankind from every possible angle and will cast them into perdition by leading them away from the straight path. However, he did not explain how he operates and what he will do to achieve this. Nevertheless, we can infer two points from what he said:

(1) He will deceive and mislead humankind by means of his own perversity—which he claimed to be an act of God. In other words, he

1 This means that *shākir* here serves as *ṣifah mushabbahah* (also called *ṣifah mushbihah*), which is an adjective that is similar to an active participle. It serves as an adjective, and indicates the establishment, subsistence, and strength of a quality in the subject. (Trans.)

approaches the people with his perverted soul, which means that what he transmits to them is perversity. This is like a fire that is placed next to some water: the fire heats up the water by its own heat. We can clearly see this idea in the following verses: *Muster the wrongdoers and their mates and what they used to worship… Some of them will turn to others, questioning each other. They will say, "Indeed you used to accost us peremptorily." They will answer, "Rather, you [yourselves] had no faith… So we perverted you, for we were perverse [ourselves]"* (37:22 and 37:27-29).

(2) What Satan affects in humankind is their mental faculty of conception and confirmation of what should and should not be done. This is the nature of Satan's activity and interaction with humans.[1] We will elaborate on this in our discussion below on Iblīs and his function.

قَالَ اخْرُجْ مِنْها مَذْؤُماً مَدْحُوراً لَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ﴿١٨﴾

(7:18) *Said He, "Begone hence, blameful* (madhʾūman)*, banished* (madḥūran)*! Whoever of them follows you, I will surely fill hell with you all."*

The adjective *madhʾūm* (in the accusative case) is derived from the verb *dhāmahu yadhāmuhu yadhīmuhu*, which is used when someone reproaches and disparages someone. The adjective *madḥūr* (in the accusative case) is derived from the verb *daḥarahu*, which is said when someone repels and rejects someone with humiliation and degradation.

…Whoever of them* (la-man) *follows you…: The letter *lām* here indicates vow [for emphasis]. The complement of the vow is: *I will surely fill hell…* Satan said this as a threat to take revenge against humankind. While the purpose of their creation was for them to be grateful, Satan claimed that he would not let that materialize. Since Satan's statement revolved around humankind, God also replied by first outlining what He will do to humankind: *Whoever of them follows you*. But then He also included Satan in His punishment in what follows next: *I will surely fill hell with you* (minkum) *all*, where the plural pronoun "you" refers to Satan and

1 This point is apparently inferred from what is narrated from Satan elsewhere in the Qur'an, where he talks about embellishing the pleasures of this life and prolonged hopes in the sights of humankind (4:119-120, 15:39, 17:64). (Trans.)

his followers among humans. This last part of the verse also bears a sign of God's mercy and grace, because instead of including all of Satan's followers, He said *minkum* (of you, from you), where the particle *min* (of, with, from) is partitive.[1]

وَ يا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَ زَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُما وَ لا تَقْرَبا هذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

(7:19) ***[Then He said to Adam,] "O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof whence you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers*** **(al-ẓālimīn, from ẓulm)."**

Here God specifically addresses Adam, but then adds his wife in His directive.

… and eat thereof whence you wish…: Although this statement is in the form of a command, it indicates permissibility [not obligation] of consuming everything except what is excluded: *but do not approach this tree.*

What is meant here by *ẓulm* (wrongdoing, injustice, oppression) is wronging and hurting oneself, not disobeying an authoritative command, because what God said was rather an advisory command.[2]

فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُما ما وُورِيَ عَنْهُما مِنْ سَوْآتِهِما وَ قالَ ما نَهاكُما رَبُّكُما عَنْ هذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلاَّ أَنْ تَكُونا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونا مِنَ

1 The meaning would be: "Whoever of them follows you, I will surely fill hell with *some of* you." However, this interpretation clearly contradicts the word "all" (*ajmaʿīn*) at the end of the verse. Therefore, the particle *min* is prefatory (*ibtidāʾiyyah*) not partitive (*tabʿīḍiyyah*). The translation above is according to this more apparent and coherent interpretation. (Trans.)

2 An "authoritative command" (*al-amr al-mawlawī*) is like what a master says to his servant, where the servant is accountable for fulfilling the master's command, and the master will mete out punishment to the servant if he disobeys. An "advisory command" (*al-amr al-irshādī*) is like a prescription that a doctor gives a patient. The doctor only *informs* the patient that if he does not follow the prescription, he will suffer pain or death as a consequence of his disobedience, not that the doctor would come and inflict that suffering as a punishment. The patient is not responsible toward the physician as the servant is toward the master. In both types of command, disobedience results in a painful consequence, but they differ in terms of responsibility and classification. (Trans.)

الْخَالِدِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(7:20) ***Then Satan tempted*** **(fa-waswasa)** ***them, to expose to them what was hidden*** **(wūriya, from muwārāh)** ***from them of their shameful parts*** **(sawʾātihimā),** ***and he said, "Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree lest you should become angels, or lest you become immortal."***

Waswasah means "prompting someone to an act with a soft quiet voice." *Muwārāh* means "concealing something by placing it behind something that covers it." *Sawʾāh* is the plural of *sawʾah*, which means "a body part that would disgrace and distress (*yasūʾu*) the person if it were to be revealed and seen."

… Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree lest you should become **(an takūnā)** ***angels*** **(malakayn)…:** The literal meaning here is, "Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree in order that you become angels or become immortal"; however, the implied meaning is: "in order *to avoid* that you become angels or become immortal."[1]

The common recitation of the verse is with the word *malak* (angel, in its dual form *malakayn*), but it also implies *mulk* (kingdom, sovereignty) based on the verse: *He [Satan] said, "O Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality, and an imperishable kingdom* (mulk)*?"* (20:120).

Majmaʿ al-bayān has narrated from the late al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍá:

> Another possible interpretation for what Satan said—*lest you should become angels…*—is that he suggested to Adam and Eve that the prohibition on eating from the tree is only applicable to the angels and the immortals, not to them. This is like when we say, "You have not been prohibited this unless you are so-and-so" (*mā nuhītaʿan kadhā illā an takūna fulānan*), where what we mean is that "only so-and-so has been prohibited." This makes Satan's deception stronger and more cunning.

However, we should reject the above possibility based on the verse from Sūrah Ṭā-Hā [20:120], which we just quoted above.

وَ قاسَمَهُما إِنِّي لَكُما لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

1 In other words, the word *karāhata* (to avoid, being unwilling) is implied in the verse. This is already incorporated in the translation above. (Trans.)

(7:21) ***And he swore to them*** **(qāsamahumā, from muqāsamah)*, "I am indeed your well-wisher*** **(al-nāṣiḥīn, from nuṣḥ).***"*

Muqāsamah [from the root *qasam* (vow, swear), in the verbal pattern *mufāʿalah*] indicates exaggeration in vow and swearing. *Nuṣḥ* (sincerity, honesty, sympathy) is the opposite of *ghishsh* (deception, cheating). The meaning is: "Satan swore to them and accentuated that he only wishes them well and gives them good counsel."

فَدَلاَّهُما بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُما سَوْآتُهُما وَ طَفِقا يَخْصِفانِ عَلَيْهِما مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَ ناداهُما رَبُّهُما أَ لَمْ أَنْهَكُما عَنْ تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَ أَقُلْ لَكُما إِنَّ الشَّيْطانَ لَكُما عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

(7:22) ***Thus he brought about their fall*** **(fa-dallāhumā, from tadliyah)** ***by deception*** **(bi-ghurūr).** ***So when they tasted of the tree, their shameful parts became exposed to them, and they began to stitch*** **(yakhṣifāni, from khaṣf)** ***over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you that Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?"***

Tadliyah means "to bring something closer to something else and make it reach the other thing." It is similar to *tadallī*, which is "to be loosened and drop down." Apparently these terms are used metaphorically, derived from the idea of suspending and sending down a bucket, where one says: *dalawtu al-dalw* (I unleashed the bucket). *Ghurūr* means "to express well-wishing while intending to cheat." *Khaṣf* is "to gather and join." One of its usages is *khaṣf al-naʿl* (cobbling, shoemaking, stitching a shoe).

… Their Lord called out **(nādāhuma, frim nidāʾ)** ***to them, "Did I not forbid you from that*** **(tilkumā)** ***tree, and tell you that Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?":*** *Nidāʾ* means "calling from a distance." The use of this term shows that at this point Adam and Eve were far from their Lord. Likewise, *tilkumā* (that) is a demonstrative pronoun that is used for objects at a distance. This shows that they were also distanced from the forbidden tree, unlike the beginning of their entrance into the garden, when God told them: *but do not approach this tree* (7:19) [where the demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhihi*) indicates an object that is near].

قالا رَبَّنا ظَلَمْنا أَنْفُسَنا وَ إِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنا وَ تَرْحَمْنا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخاسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(7:23) ***They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves! If You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."***

This prayer by Adam and Eve shows their utmost level of humility and earnest petition before their Lord, such that they did not explicitly request anything. They only expressed their dire need for God's forgiveness and mercy, and the risk of their eternal failure. They expressed these points and left the rest to God's will.

قالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَ مَتاعٌ إِلى حِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(7:24) ***He said, "Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for some time."***

Apparently the verse has a consistent theme, which means that all its plural pronouns refer to Adam, his wife, and Satan.[1] God addresses them with two decrees: (1) They shall be enemies of one another—according to their evident difference of nature and makeup. (2) They shall have an abode on the earth until the end of the life of this world (*dunyā*).

قالَ فِيها تَحْيَوْنَ وَ فِيها تَمُوتُونَ وَ مِنْها تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(7:25) ***He said, "In it you will live, and in it you will die; and from it you will be raised [from the dead]."***

This is a third decree that God made, but it is likely that this was specifically addressed to Adam, Eve, and their descendants, because the verse is separated from the last verse by the repetition of the word *qāla* (He said) [which could have been left out]. God decreed that they should be bound on the earth until the Resurrection. We discussed the story of Adam's garden elaborately in Sūrah al-Baqarah. Interested readers should refer to there.[2]

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1 Another similar verse is: *He [God] said, "Get down both of you from it, all together, being enemies of one another…"* (20:123). Here God addresses Adam and Eve using a dual pronoun, but then switches to plural pronouns and uses the word *jamīʿan* (all together). This strengthens an alternative possibility that the current verse (7:24) is addressed to Adam, Eve and *their descendants*, not Satan. Also see my first note under verse 7:11 above. (Trans.)

2 See volume 1, pp. 213ff of the English translation, under verses 2:35-39. (Trans.)

Iblīs and his Function

Unfortunately, the topic of Iblīs (Satan, the Devil) has become vulgarized among us. We do not pay any serious attention to it—other than mentioning him here and there by cursing him, seeking refuge in God from him, and describing our evil thoughts as being Satanic and a result of his temptations and whispers. However, we do not tend to contemplate what the Qur'an says about the reality of this strange creature which is hidden from our senses. His authority and impact on human life is truly stupendous.

Satan is certainly a wondrous creature, for he has been present in the human world despite its vastness, ever since the onset of its existence. And he will continue to be with humans all the way until the end of this realm, when the world's spread is rolled up. Then he will continue to be with some humans after their death, until he submits them to hell forever. He is with each and every single one of us while being with others as well. He accompanies us both outwardly and inwardly, penetrating to the most hidden imaginations that we entertain in our mind and the thoughts that are hidden in our inmost secret. He is not veiled from us by anything, nor is he engaged by anything from attending to us.

Muslim scholars have neglected going into any depth on this topic. They have predominantly pursued the line of discussion presented by the scholars in the early years of Islam, which consists of simple points that spring in the minds of the public when they first hear about Satan in the Qur'an. Every sect has understood his story in its own [superficial] way, has set that as a bulwark to defend its principles, and has drawn on it to quarrel against the other sects through polemical debate. Their discussions are limited to listing various questions and objections that are raised regarding the story, elaborating the problems, and then answering them from different dimensions.

Some examples of these questions are:

(1) Why did God create Iblīs to begin with, even though He knew who this creature is [and will be]?
(2) Why did God join Iblīs with the angels, even though he was not one of them?
(3) Why did God order Iblīs to prostrate, even though He knew that he would not comply?
(4) Why did God not force him to prostrate, but instead led him

astray?

(5) Why did God not kill Iblīs when he did not prostrate?

(6) Why did God give Iblīs respite *till the day they will be resurrected* [7:14, 15:36, 38:79] or *until the day of the known time* [15:38, 38:81]?

(7) Why did God give Iblīs such an amazing reign over humankind, such that he flows in them like blood? Why did God provide Iblīs with infantry and cavalry [17:64]? Why did God give him access to every aspect of human life?

(8) Why did God not make Iblīs' workings on humankind sensible to them, so that they may protect themselves against his temptations?

(9) Why did God not give to humankind the same power over Iblīs as he gave to Iblīs over humankind?

(10) Why did God not conceal the details and secrets of the creation of Adam and his descendants from Iblīs so that he may not wish to mislead them?

(11) How was it possible for Iblīs to talk to God, even though he was neither a prophet nor an angel, but was the most distant and hated creation to God? In response to this, some have said that it was a miracle (*muʿjizah*) that he spoke with God. Others have said that he spoke indirectly by creating some signs that conveyed what he meant. However, there is no evidence to prove either of these views.

(12) How did Iblīs enter paradise [that is, Adam's garden]?

(13) How could there be temptation, sin and lying in paradise, even though it is a place of purity and sanctity?

(14) How come Adam accepted what Iblīs said, even though it was contrary to what God had told him?

(15) How could Adam be tempted by kingdom and eternity [in this world; 20:120], even though that is against the belief in the hereafter [which implies that nothing in this world lasts]?

(16) How could Adam sin even though he was an infallible prophet?

(17) How come when God accepted Adam's repentance, he was not taken back to his original position? Is it not true that "one who repents from sin is like one who has no sin"[1]?

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1 This is a famous hadith, narrated from the Prophet and the Imams in Sunni and Shia sources. (Trans.)

And the list continues. In response to such questions, here is a list of what exegetes have said with respect to this story. Here we can clearly trace their unfounded polemical debates, and their negligence in doing justice to this topic:

(1) The entire story is absolutely imaginative, where Adam is a representation of humankind [otherwise, there was no real person called Adam].
(2) What the Qur'an calls "Iblīs" is rather our evil inclinations and temptations [not an external entity].
(3) There is no rational problem with ascribing evil and wickedness to God. Rather, all sins are His acts. He creates evil and ruins His own creation. Good is whatever He commands, and evil is whatever He prohibits.
(4) Adam was not a prophet.
(5) Prophets are not infallible in any point in their life.
(6) Prophets are not infallible before they are chosen as prophets. In this case, the story of the garden occurred before Adam was appointed a prophet.
(7) This story was nothing but a test and trial [by God]. However, the advocates of this claim have not identified the standard [of success] in this huge test, which has led many people into error and fatality.

If we do not have a clear principle to treat this issue at the grass roots, all of the above objections would rise again.

A fundamental problem that the scholars have fallen into with respect to this topic is failing to distinguish between what pertains to *ḥaqīqah* (existential reality, external world) and what pertains to *iʿtibār* (social convention, mental construction). They have not discerned the difference between the realm of *takwīn* (creation, causation, existence) and the realm of *tashrīʿ* (legislation, injunction). As a result, they have often applied legislative principles to creational matters, while they are only applicable as social contracts. This has ruined their entire discussion.

Clarifying the Problem

To do justice to this topic without any prejudice, we must make note of three principles:

(1) The existence of anything—in and of itself, and regardless of

its relation with other things—can only be good. Evil is only relational. Otherwise, what is created and brought into existence is always good. This is a direct consequence of the meaning of "existence." Suppose that something which is evil in its essence were to be created. Once it is created, it is an "existent" with certain existential properties. In and of itself, it will be an existent that has come from God, is sustained by Him, and returns to Him. In this sense, it is no different from any other being and has no element of evil in it. Evil comes into play only when we consider the relationship between one being with other beings, where it may contravene a fair order in the world or cause some deprivation for another being. That is what is meant when we say that evil is necessarily a relative or relational property.

We can further add that whatever we consider to be evil in the world, must have benefits that necessarily exceed its harm. Otherwise, its creation would be against God's wisdom and the robust order of the universe. The Qur'an says: *He has perfected everything that He has created* (32:7); *Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations* (7:54); *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44).

(2) Even though the world of creation is enormously vast and consists of numerous parts, all these parts are linked to one another, and compose a consistent whole. This means that to create some part is to create the rest, and to fix one part is to fix the whole. What makes this world this world, is that it is composed of disparate constituents. Diversity and disparity are part and parcel of this world. A necessary implication of this, according to divine wisdom, is that the constituting parts of this world have a variety of harmonious and disharmonious relationships with one another. They stand at different levels of perfection or imperfection, possession or deficiency, achievement or failure. If there were no difference between them, then they would no longer be many, and their multitude would collapse into a single unit without any distinction or discrepancy. Then this world would no longer exist. God says: *and Our command is but a single [word], like the twinkling of an eye* (54:50).[1]

This means that if there were no evil properties such as corruption, weariness, privation, imperfection and weakness, there would be no

1 In other words, an essential property of this world is multiplicity, and multiplicity, by definition, necessitates difference. Verse 54:50 refers to a single command which marks the end of this realm of multiplicity. (Trans.)

instance of good properties such as health, comfort, possession and perfection. Had there been no instance of these things, we could not infer their meanings either, because we construct mental concepts based external instances. Likewise, if there were no misery, there would be no felicity; if there were no disobedience, there would be no obedience; if there were nothing to blame, there would be nothing to praise; if there were no punishment, there would be no reward; and if there were no world, there would be no hereafter.

To show this, we can look at the case of obedience as an example. Obedience means complying with an authoritative command (*al-amr al-mawlawī*). However, this is only meaningful if there is also the possibility of disobedience. Otherwise, one's act would be necessary and inevitable. If one's acts occur out of necessity, authoritative commands would be meaningless, because it is logically impossible to acquire what has already been acquired (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*). If there is no authoritative command, there will be no instance of obedience, and without any instance of obedience, there will be no concept of it, as we explained above. Then, if there is no obedience or disobedience, there will be no place for praise or blame, which are consequent to them. Likewise, there would be no room for reward, punishment, promise, threat, encouragement or warning. This would make void the call and laws of religion in their entirety, as well as prophethood and messengership. Without these, there would be no society or civilization, without which there would be no humanity, and that would mean the collapse of the entire system of creation. The same analysis can be applied to all other dichotomies in the world. The reader should reflect on this.[1]

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1 Having a non-dualistic view of life (called Advaita) will lead to transcending choice, having no preference, and going beyond good and evil. There is only a single whole, which is the reality, which manifests in different forms of good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, obedience and disobedience. If we realize that these dichotomies are two sides of the same coin of creation and existence, that one is inseparable from the other because they are parts of the same whole, then we can make a breakthrough to mystical detachment and indifference, which is a foundation for spiritual liberation. This detachment is *zuhd* (disinterestedness) in its advanced level, where *zuhd* is not the opposite of materialism, but it is the opposite of duality and distinction. It is to transcend the opposites and behold their underlying oneness without any preference. (Trans.)

Given the above explanation, it should be clear that the existence of Satan—as a force that pulls toward evil and disobedience—is part of the structure of the human world, which pursues human perfection through free will. Humans have a path to follow laboriously until they meet their Lord [84:6]. If we think of the straight path as a road, Satan's position would mark the sides or shoulders of this road. Evidently, one cannot define the center of a road if it has no borders which surround it from the outside. If there are no sides, it is also meaningless to have a center. The reader should reflect on this in the light of these verses: *He [Iblīs] said: "As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path"* (7:16); *He [God] said, "This is a straight path incumbent upon Me. Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you"* (15:41-42).

If you reflect on the above two points, as well as the verses about the prostration of the angels and Satan to Adam, then you will realize that the story discussed in these verses is about a real relationship that exists between humans, angels and Satan. In order to depict their positions with respect to one another, the Qur'an talks about God's command [to prostrate to Adam], the compliance [of the angels], the defiance of Satan, and his subsequent expulsion, banishment and conversation with God. All objections with respect to this story are due to not contemplating it fully.

For instance, one exegete[1] has rightly realized that the verses refer to the nature of humankind, angels and Satan. However, he has wrongly interpreted God's command and prohibition in this story—that is, God's command to Satan to prostrate, and His prohibition of Adam from eating from the tree—as *takwīnī* (existential, creational, causal) orders. This contradicts his previous observation. It has eluded him that God's *takwīnī* orders cannot be violated, while Iblīs disobeyed God's command, and Adam disobeyed His prohibition.

(3) As we discussed under the verses in Sūrah al-Baqarah [2:30ff], this story refers to a garden in *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this life and the Resurrection), which God created for a special purpose. While Adam was to be charged with religious obligation and authoritative commands in his earthly life, God placed him first in that garden in order reveal some facts about human nature by testing it. That stage

1 *Tafsīr al-manār*, volume 8, under the current verses, titled "Questions Concerning the Story" (*al-ishkālāt fī al-qiṣṣah*). (Auth.)

was meant to show the need of humans to experience life on earth. They must be exposed to God's commands and prohibitions throughout their life on earth. If they comply, they will qualify for the [eternal] Garden. If not, they will not. This is humakind's way to attain divine proximity and eternal bliss.

The above points should clarify that none of the objections that the exegetes have raised about the story of the garden is applicable. First, the garden was not one of the eternal gardens in the hereafter. In the hereafter, only the friends of God are admitted to paradise, and they will never leave it after their entry. Second, the garden was not in this world either, in the sense that it was not governed by authoritarian commands and prohibitions. It was not of a nature of this world, where religious obligation is applicable. Rather, it was a place to manifest human nature, and this brings us to our third observation: the story is not about Adam as an individual, but as a representative of all humans. He was placed in that garden *because* he was a human, and the angels and Satan were ordered to prostrate themselves before him *as a human*. We have already explained all these points.

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Back to Iblīs

God does not give us much detail about the essence of this evil creature called Iblīs. The Qur'an describes Iblīs as follows: *He [Iblīs] was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command* (18:50), and narrates from him: *You created me from fire* (7:12). This shows that he is of the kind of the jinn, and the main element in his creation was fire. The Qur'an does not elaborate the stages of his creation as it discusses the creation of humankind in detail. There are, however, some verses that can reveal some more information about Iblīs. For instance, God narrates from him: *I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful* (7:16-17). Here he proclaims that he will get a hold of humankind through their psychological traits and emotions such as fear, hope, ambition, plans, lust and anger. Thus he will influence their thoughts and decisions which are based on these feelings.

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Another example is: *My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize [evil] for them on the earth* (15:39). This means that he makes vain, foul and indecent acts appear appealing to humankind by

embellishing them with various adornments and attractions, as a means of leading them astray. For instance, one imagines fornication and finds it appealing because of his lust, such that its indecency and evil consequences become faint in his mind, to the point that he confirms his lust and commits the act. Other similar verses are: *He [Satan] makes them promises and gives them [false] hopes, yet Satan does not promise them anything but delusion* (4:120); *But Satan made their deeds seem decorous to them* (16:63).

As the readers can see, all these verses indicate that the sphere of Satan's activity is human cognition, and his means of operation are feelings and emotions. He entices the passions of the people and appeals to their sentiments. He infuses false ideas and vain illusions into the human soul, as the Qur'an says: *who puts temptations into the breasts of humans, from among the jinn and humans* (114:5-6). Meanwhile, we find these ideas and imaginations—which we call "the whispers and temptations of the Devil" (*wasāwis*, sing. *waswasah*)—to be our own thoughts, without having any doubts about it. We do not sense anyone imparting them to us from outside. Nor do we acquire them through an intellectual process. Rather, we find them readily available to us, much like statements such as "one is half of two" and "four is even."

There is no contradiction between saying that these ideas and imaginations are our own, and saying that Satan inspires them to our mind. The thing is that Satan's involvement here is not like the involvement of other people who give us some information or command us to do something. If it were of that sort, then we would no longer have independence of thought, and our acts would no longer be called voluntary, because they ensue from the knowledge, preference and will of Satan, not us. Then there would be no blame or censure on us for our misdeeds. However, Satan himself holds us responsible for our deeds on the Day of Resurrection, as God narrates from him: *When the matter is all over, Satan will say, "Indeed Allah made you a promise that was true and I [too] made you a promise, but I failed you. I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your distress calls, neither can you respond to my distress calls. Indeed I disavow your taking me for [Allah's] partner aforetime. There is indeed a painful punishment for the wrongdoers"* (14:22). Here he describes humans as actors and wrongdoers who should bear the blame,

and exonerates himself of that. Satan denies of himself all authority except as much as calling and making false promises. Likewise, God states that he has no authority over anyone except for those who follow him: *Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you* (15:42). Elsewhere He says [about the sinner]: *His companion [that is, Satan] will say, "Our Lord! I did not make him a rebel, but he [himself] was in extreme error"* (50:27).

Overall, the role of the person and the role of Satan in the cognitive process have a *ṭūlī* relationship (vertical, longitudinal, causal), meaning that they belong to two planes of existence, where one is a cause or means for the other. Hence, Satan's involvement in this process is compatible with the involvement of the person, and the resulting act can be rightly attributed to both. Satan's acts do not have an *ʿarḍī* relationship (horizontal, latitudinal, parallel) with our acts, meaning that he does not operate at the same plane as we do. If that were the case, then any act could either be attributed to us or to him, but not to both.[1]

Satan influences our cognition in all our affairs and dealings in this world, through deception and adornment. He presents falsehood to us in place of truth, such that we deal with things only through their illusory aspect, which is deceptive and bars us from the truth. More precisely, his deception and adornment is that he makes us perceive ourselves and other things in life to be independent entities. This view prevents us from realizing the Truth, and distracts us from real life. As we said, this can be deduced from what the Qur'an narrates from him: *As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely lie in wait for them* (7:16); *My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize [evil] for them on the earth* (15:39). This boils down to being heedless of God (*ghaflah*), which is

1 A vertical (*ṭūlī*) relationship can be compared to concentric circles, where a point can be inside both and rightly attributed to both of them. A horizontal (*ʿarḍī*) relationship can be compared to mutually exclusive circles, where there is no overlap between them. The distinction between vertical and horizontal relationships is key to understanding free will despite the deterministic system of causes and effect. In the case of God, the matter is more profound and subtle, because even the existence and acts of Satan are vertically tied to Him. This is the metaphysical solution. There is yet a mystical explanation, which lies in the idea of *tajallī* (manifestation, epiphany, divine expression). For more on vertical and horizontal relationships, see my footnote on volume 16, pp. 6-7. (Trans.)

the root of every sin. God says: *Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans: they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless* (7:179).

So we can say that Satan is the source of this sense of independence and being unmindful of God, which results in all kinds of false beliefs, illusions, polytheism and wrongdoing. Meanwhile, since one feels himself to be independent, he imagines that this very impression has arisen from himself and belongs to him! This shows how pervasive Satan's machination is, such that it leaves its mark on any subsequent view or practice that the person may have. This is how one goes under the authority, direction and influence of Satan, without realizing any force being involved beyond oneself. Thus God says: *Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them. We have indeed made the devils guardians of those who have no faith* (7:27).

It should be noted that Satan's authority over humans with respect to theirs sins and wrongdoing is like the authority of angels over them with respect to their obedience and good deeds, as the Qur'an describes: *Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is Allah!" and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying,] "Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised. We are your friends in the life of this world"* (41:30-31). The Devil and the angels operate at the same plane, while God, above all, is the ultimate authority without any rival. *And Allah besieges them from all around* (85:20); *You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor* (32:4).

This is the bit and rein of Satan which God describes elsewhere: *Said he [Satan], "Do You see this one whom You have honored above me? If You respite me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely rein his progeny, [all] except a few." Said He, "Begone! Whoever of them follows you, indeed the hell shall be your requital, an ample reward. Entice whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, and share with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them!" But Satan promises them nothing but delusion* (17:62:64). The meaning is: "I shall reign over them by putting a rein and bit on them, just as a rider controls the horse by pulling the bridle. Hence they will obey me in whatever I command them, and will turn toward wherever I direct them,

without any resistance or disobedience whatsoever."

We can also deduce from the verses of the Qur'an that Satan has certain hosts and armies which assist him, obey his commands, and help him achieve what he wants. As we quoted above, the Qur'an says: *Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them* (7:27). Regardless of how many these hosts are and how diverse their activities may be, they work under the umbrella of Iblīs. Their work is his work, and their temptations are his, as he ascribes this to himself in several verses such as: *I will surely pervert them all* (15:39). This is much like the case of the angels, where there are some archangels who have many assistants which operate under their direction. The acts of the subordinates are imputable to their superiors. For instance, God says concerning the Angel of Death and his subordinates: *Say, "You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you. Then you will be brought back to your Lord"* (32:11); *When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away and they do not neglect [their duty]* (6:61).

There are a few points about the hosts of Satan which we can infer from the Qur'an:

(1) *Who puts temptations into the breasts of humans, from among the jinn and humans* (114:5-6). This shows that the hosts of Satan include both humans and jinn.

(2) *Will you then take him and his offspring for guardians in My stead, though they are your enemies?* (18:50). This verse shows that part of Satan's hosts are his descendants, but the Qur'an does not give us any more information about the process of their procreation.

(3) *And rally against them your cavalry and your infantry* (17:64). According to this verse, his soldiers differ in terms of strength and speed of operation. That is the difference between cavalry and infantry, where one is more swift and effective in operations.

(4) *And say, "My Lord! I seek Your protection from the promptings of devils; and I seek Your protection, my Lord, from their presence near me"* (23:97-98). This suggests that some devils work in groups, while others work individually. Perhaps we can also deduce the same point from these verses: *Should I inform you on whom the devils descend? They descend on every sinful liar. They eavesdrop, and most of them are liars* (26:221-223).

Summary

Iblīs is a real being who was created by God, is possessed of intelligence and will, and prompts the people to disobey God. Until before the creation of Adam, Satan was at the same level as the angels, without any distinction between them. After that, there was a split between Satan and the angels, where Satan chose the side of evil and mischief. Certain acts of humankind—such as their deviation from the straight path, their inclination to error and wretchedness, and their pursuit of falsehood and disobedience—can be ascribed to Satan in one way or another. He can be compared to the angels, who are also creatures with intelligence and will. Angels too can be credited, in one way or another, with certain acts of humankind, including their achievement of ultimate happiness, perfection, and the abode of divine proximity.

Satan has a diverse set of hosts among the jinn, the humankind, and his progeny. They follow his command and influence all worldly affairs and dealings of humankind. Their job is to present falsehood in the form of truth, and decorate what is foul and evil as fair and good. Their fields of operation include both the physical and psychological aspects of human life. They affect every aspect of the people's worldly life, such as wealth, children and so on. They work in many diverse ways, collectively and individually, quickly and slowly, directly and indirectly. We can arguably add that their influence is not limited to evil and disobedience, but may also include good deeds and obedience.

Meanwhile, one does not feel the involvement and influence of the devils in anything that they do. Instead, one only sees oneself and one's own acts. This shows that the devils are not at the same level of existence as us, and they do not operate at the same plane as we do. All we know is what God has informed us: that Iblīs is one of the jinn, was created from fire, and had a change of course from his initial position.

The Objections of Satan against the Angels: A Qur'anic and Rational Discussion

Rūḥ al-maʿānī says:

> There is a debate that hypothetically took place between the Devil and the angels after the story of prostration. Al-Shahrastānī has quoted this from one of the commentators of the four Gospels, and it is also mentioned in the Torah. According to this account,

the cursed Devil told the angels: "I admit that I have a God Who has created me and brought me to existence. However, I have some questions with respect to His wisdom:

(1) What was the point of creation? Especially with respect to the disbelievers, since God knew that they will end up in hell.
(2) What is the point of religious obligation? After all, no benefit or loss reaches God. If it is about some benefit accruing to His creation, He could have given it to them directly, without needing the channel of their obedience.
(3) Granted that He obligated me to know Him and obey Him, why did He oblige me to prostrate myself to Adam?
(4) When I refused to prostrate, why did He curse me and decree my punishment, even though there is no benefit in that for Him or anyone else, but there is the greatest loss in it for me?[1]
(5) When He cursed me, why did He still give me authority over Adam's children and enable me to deceive and mislead them?
(6) When I requested Him to respite me for such a long time, why did He grant my request, even though clearly a world without evil would have been better?"

The commentator of the Gospels says: Then God revealed to Satan from His station of glory and holiness: "O Iblīs! You do not know Me! Had you known Me, you would have realized that no objection can be raised to any of My acts. For indeed I am Allah, there is no god but Me, and I am never held accountable for what I do."

Then al-Ālūsī quotes from al-Imām al-Rāzī:

If all people are gathered from the beginning of creation until its end, they would not find any way out of these objections as long as they advocate independent rational values. They would have

1 Al-Shahrastānī has quoted seven questions from Satan, but the fifth one is not narrated by al-Ālūsī. It is: "Once God cursed and repelled me, why did He then let me enter the garden and deceive Adam with temptation? And why did He expel Adam with me from the garden? Had He not let me enter the garden, Adam would have been secure from me and could have stayed in the garden eternally." The answer to this is to be found in the author's discussion above, just before the section entitled "Back to Iblīs." (Trans.)

to concede all of these problems.[1]

Al-Ālūsī then adds:

> Here I shall present an account which I find quite fascinating. It is narrated that once Sayf al-Dawlah b. Ḥamdān met his entourage and said, "I have composed a line of poetry that I cannot conceive of anyone being able to add a second line to it—except perhaps for Abū Firās."[2] Incidentally, Abū Firās was sitting there in the crowd. They told him, "What is your poem?" He recited:

لَكَ جِسْمِي تَعُلُّهُ فَدَمِي لِمَ تَطُلُّهُ

You keep striking my body,
Which is yours, I agree;
But why spill my blood?
This is my plea!

> Then Abū Firās improvised:

قَالَ إِنْ كُنْتُ مَالِكاً فَلِيَ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ

He said, "If I'm the owner
Then it's all up to me!"

Detailed Response to Satan's Objections

Our explanations above would answer all of these six objections, without needing the entire creation to gather from the beginning to the end—as al-Imām [al-Rāzī] has claimed—and still being unable to solve them. For further clarification, we shall discuss the six questions one by one:

(1) The first objection is about the wisdom behind God's creation. This refers to the aspect of good and benefit in an act which makes an agent

1 This refers to the historical debate between Ashʿarite and Muʿtazilite theologians concerning the root of moral values and the divine command theory in ethics. (Trans.)

2 Sayf al-Dawlah (d. 967 CE) was the founder of the Emirate of Aleppo. Abū Firās al-Ḥārith b. Saʿīd al-Ḥamdānī (d. 968 CE) was a renowned Arab poet and governor. (Trans.)

perform the act. In the case of God, one can ask about the wisdom behind the creation of all beings in general, or the wisdom behind the creation of humankind in particular.

If the question is about God's act of creation in general, then it has been proven in its place that God is a perfect agent Who is absolutely needless of anything beyond Himself. He does not depend on anything to complete His agency (*fāʿiliyyah*) or divinity (*ulūhiyyah*). He is the origin of everything other than Him and the source of all good and mercy by the virtue of His essence. His very existence necessitates the creation, because one of His essential qualities is that He is the Origin, and it is senseless to demand a reason for a necessary property.[1] We can compare this to one who is inherently generous, meaning that generosity has become a *malakah* (second nature, natural disposition, permanent quality) to him. Such nature necessitates—by the virtue of itself, not by anything external to it—to manifest certain signs, effects and blessings. If it manifests because of any consideration other than the quality itself, then that would not be a *malakah*. It is a necessary consequence of this essence to have certain expressions, where everyone would benefit from it according to their receptive capability and capacity. If the containers differ in terms of their capacity to receive blessings, then that difference goes back to them, not to the essential property of the agent, which is only a source of good.

It is often said that there must be some wisdom—meaning a purpose or beneficial aspect—in the act of an agent, where the agent does the act for that purpose. In the case of imperfect agents, this would be a benefit that accrues to the agent who lacks it before doing the act, and grows to perfection by achieving that objective. However, in the case of an Agent Who possesses all good and perfection, His purpose in His acts would be His very essence. He is not motivated to act in order to achieve anything beyond Himself, just as we saw in the case of generosity when it becomes an established property in the person. It is true that the acts of such an Agent have numerous benefits, and that God's blessings never end, but these benefits and blessings are not primary objective that God aims for in His acts [as imperfect agents aim for objectives in their acts]. They are

1 This would be like asking, "Why does $x = x$?" The answer is: "Otherwise, it would be something else." It is logically incoherent to demand a cause or reason for an essential property. For the same reason, one cannot demand a reason for what necessarily issues from an essential property. (Trans.)

rather secondary objectives and by-products of His agency. This is what we can say about God's creation overall.[1]

The question, however, seems to be about the wisdom behind creating humankind, because it points to God's knowledge that disbelievers would end up in hell. As we said above, the point in God's creation cannot be interpreted as something that He gains and benefits from. God is rich and needless of all things by the virtue of His essence. He is not perfected by achieving anything. What is meant by wisdom in the case of God is the perfection of His act to full fruition. His wisdom in the creation of humankind is to take the abject earthly material and make a special composition of it which will be able to journey toward a degree of perfection that is above the perfection of all other beings in existence. He has created a being of dust which can reach a degree of proximity to his Lord that cannot be achieved by anything else. This is the ultimate purpose of the human species.

Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that this creature is made of earthly material, which [inherently and necessarily] consists of opposites. It grows in a realm of multiplicity and conflict, and is surrounded by favorable and unfavorable phenomena. This entails that not all members of such a species would be spared of the opposing forces in this life. Hence, only a subset of them will come to fruition and succeed in making it to their desired happy end.

This is nothing exclusive to humankind. Rather, all material beings in this world are like this, including all animals, plants, and inorganic objects. There are millions of various species in this world, and all of them have a certain perfection which they pursue as a species. However, not every member of the species reaches that goal. They achieve their perfection collectively as a species, but not individually. There are many members which perish along the way, due to unfavorable causes and events which stop their growth. They fail to reach the end that is intended for them. We cannot even assume a being in the world of nature which is secure from these opposing factors. All species in the world of nature are surrounded by such factors, and these factors will inevitably have their impact on the

1 In these discussions, benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), purpose (*gharaḍ*), objective (*ghāyah*) and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) are interdependent and concurrent. An act done out of wisdom is never devoid of some purpose and objective, which is some *maṣlaḥah* (benefit, betterment, advantage, interest) at some level. (Trans.)

species. Suppose a plant that is unaffected by forces that are against its natural composition—such as heat, cold, light, darkness, moisture, dryness, poison and harmful minerals. That would contradict the assumption that it is a plant with a special natural composition, and also the universal law of causality. Such expectation of a species is against the order of the entire universe [which has the universal law of causality at its core].

If the acts and efforts of some members of a species go to waste, that is not necessarily vain and contrary to wisdom, as long as the entire setup leads other members to their intended goal and perfection, meaning the ultimate end of that species. This is the most that can come out of material creation. Moreover, it is worthwhile to spend large amounts of matter—which is at the base of all planes of existence and the least worthy of them all—in order to acquire a few sublime jewels that top all existential perfections. That would be a real gain rather than a loss or waste of resources.

The objective in the creation of humankind is the perfect human being who reaches the pinnacle of felicity in this world and the next. However, humans are a material species, in that they are composed of matter and exist in the world of nature. This composition means that they are subject to the laws of the material world which govern all beings in the realm of nature. They are born and grow in a realm with various forces at work and different factors that affect each other. A necessary consequence of such a mode of existence is that some members of this species (the homo sapiens) would fail to reach the desired human perfection. Hence, the achievement of maximum human perfection is the primary and essential purpose of creation of humankind, while the failure of some members is intended secondarily as an unavoidable consequence of the first objective.

God's purpose in the creation of humankind is for them to achieve their ultimate perfection. He knows that many of them will be disbelievers and thus end up in hell, but this does not harm His primary objective in the creation of the entire species. Moreover, what makes someone a disbeliever—and thus subject to punishment in the hereafter—is not the fact that they are created by God, but there are numerous factors which determine this end for a person, the last of which is the person's choice [to disbelieve and do evil voluntarily]. Because of this element of choice, they are responsible for their disbelief. Their disbelief is a result of several constituent causes, where only some of these constituent causes can be ascribed to their Creator. Finally, one may say that God has indeed willed

their disbelief, but God has willed so only *through* their choice and volition. His will does not render them compelled to act in a certain way—like a rock that falls toward the earth involuntarily.

(2) Questioning religious obligations on the basis that "no benefit or loss reaches God" is a fallacy because it assumes that the same laws which govern imperfect agents are applicable to a Perfect Agent Who is completely rich and needless in His essence. It is a rule of reason that for any act to be wise and sensible, it must have some benefit for the actor, but this rule is only applicable to imperfect agents which seek to perfect themselves and gain some benefit through their act. It is not applicable to God, Who is assumed to be an essentially needless agent. There is no rational argument for either of the following claims: (i) All agents must derive some benefit from their act, including agents that are needless by the virtue of their essence. (ii) If an agent is needless by the virtue of its essence, then it is impossible for it to perform any act.

Religious obligations pertain to the domain of *iʿtibār* (convention, social contract, mental construction), which is distinct from the domain of *ḥaqīqah* (existential reality, external world). Nevertheless, it is through social and religious conventions and laws that the individuals move from one mode of existence to a more complete mode of existence. Hence, religious obligations are a link between two real external entities.[1]

To further clarify this, we know both experimentally and rationally that all species in the realm of nature are subject to "motion" in its metaphysical sense, meaning that they follow a path that extends from a state of potentiality to a state of actualization. This connected line of growth is

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1 *Ḥaqīqī* (real) is an adjective for an entity or property that exists in the absence of a thinking mind. It is something objective that does not depend on a subject to conceive or construct it. *Iʿtibārī* (conventional, socially constructed, mentally posited) is an adjective of a concept or proposition that is a result of a mental operation. It exists in the mind of an intelligent subject. The relation between the two can be compared with the relation between objective and subjective. "Good," "bad," "saint," "sinner," "obedience" and "disobedience" are all labels that our mind applies to external events. What is out there is only that which is. It is an objective occurrence that is neutral with respect to our legal and moral classifications. That is the real existence of any event, and that is what is attributable to God, Who is absolute existence. Not mixing between the external existence of things and our mental commentaries on them is the key to realizing oneness (*tawḥīd*). (Trans.)

what marks the continuation and subsistence (*baqā'*) of that being which is ever changing. The different links in this chain of growth have a real and organic connection with one another, such that one leads to the next. The being pursues these links as stages of its growth, and aims toward the final destination from the very onset of its existence.

For example, a grain of wheat is headed toward a full wheat plant from the very beginning when it splits and sprouts. Similarly, the zygote of an animal is on the path to become a mature animal with everything that makes that species complete. The human being is no exception to this universal law. Every individual, from the very beginning of their conception, are directed toward the stage of maximum human perfection and eternal happiness. Sometimes the beings reach their intended objective, and sometimes their growth is interrupted by certain obstacles.

Now, human beings have a kind of existence that requires them to live socially, and social life is only possible under certain laws and norms that are accepted among the members of the society. This is called social contract. It is a set of conventional views, values and laws, whether rooted in religion or not. Acting in accordance to these principles will develop a set of beliefs and traits in the individuals, which result in their happy life in this world. Likewise, their happiness in the hereafter is a consequence of their adherence to these conventional matters, which results in either reward or punishment.

Hence, the wisdom in religious obligation is that it bears with itself a gradual transformation for humans toward their ultimate perfection, according to their individual traits and personalities. By acting upon these injunctions, they advance step-by-step toward an end that is better and more lasting for them. In case they neglect these instructions, they will fail to achieve that end. In this sense, humankind is just like any other species: they have a path which leads them to their perfection as long as the means and requirements are there; but if the conditions of their growth are not met, they will not reach their intended goal. If one asks, "what is the point of religious obligation?" it is like asking "what is the point of nourishment for plants?" or "why should animals mate even though it has no benefit [for God]?"

Another part of Satan's objection was: "God could give any benefit to His creatures directly and without the intermediation of religious obligations." This is also a fallacy. Based on what we said above, we are talking

about a species whose creation is such that it must follow a gradual path toward perfection. Religious obligations are directed at humans (and other similar beings that are subject to religious legislation)[1] because that is their path from potentiality to actualization. They need these injunctions for their existential transformation toward their full development. Satan's objection can be interpreted in two ways:

(i) "Why the path of religious obligation and not another path?" We can answer this question in two ways: (a) A destructive answer (*al-jawāb al-naqḍī*), which would be: "Why not?" That is, there must be *some* path and intermediation for beings that grow gradually, and any perceivable path would be identical to any other path inasmuch as they are all intermediary stages. If another path had been set for humankind, then one could equally ask, "Why this path and not another?" (b) A constructive answer (*al-jawāb al-ḥallī*), saying that the laws and factors which govern humankind are such that they require a set of religious obligations for this species to reach its perfection. They need to purify their souls and purge their inside by persistent adherence to these obligations. Their creation is such that they need these injunctions in order to grow.

(ii) "Why any intermediation at all? Why not create them from the beginning in an actualized state, at full perfection and eternal bliss? Why should there be some movement and gradual growth?" The answer is: That would negate existential transformation, materiality and potentiality, all of which are necessary properties of a contingent creation [in the world of nature]. A being like that would be a being that is created from day one in a state of immateriality, perfection and happiness. That is not the case of humans, which are created from the earth as imperfect beings, which should then actualize their potentialities gradually. In other words, the proposed scenario is self-contradictory.[2]

(3) Satan said: "Granted that He obligated me to know Him and obey Him, why did He oblige me to prostrate myself to Adam?" The answer to this question is obvious: God's order served to complete and actualize Satan. If he chose to prostrate himself to Adam, then his quality of servitude and obedience to God would be completed. And if he refused to do

1 Such as the jinn. (Trans.)

2 It is self-contradictory because it is proposed about human beings, but it entails that they should be other beings. Humankind is a material creation, and such creation cannot be divested of gradual transformation. (Trans.)

so, then that would manifest his pride and defiance. Either way, this order entails a perfection of a quality in Satan by God, either in the direction of fortune or misfortune. Satan chose the latter.

Moreover, commanding Satan and the angels to prostrate to Adam laid out the straight path which Adam and his descendants should follow. This path requires some helpers who call them to good, which are the angels; and some enemies who call them to deviation and error, which are Satan and his hosts. We already discussed this quality [of the straight path] and these two roles [of angels and devils].[1]

(4) Satan said: "Why did God curse me and decreed my punishment when I disobeyed His command, even though that does not benefit Him?" The answer is that God's curse and punishment are not an arbitrary assignment, but they signify a reality. They are an inevitable consequence of having a sense of arrogance and defiance against God, which is the root of every disobedience. As we said above, God does not act in pursuit of some gain or interest, so it is irrelevant to question His deeds on this account.

His objection is like saying: "Why should one who drinks poison die by it? Why doesn't God make that a source of healing for the person, given that He does not benefit from the person's death, while the person suffers a great loss? Why doesn't He make poison quench his thirst, nourish his body, and please his senses?" All these expectations are due to ignorance about the system of cause and effect, which God has placed in the world. Every phenomenon in this world is connected to its specific causes and means, such that it necessarily occurs as a result of those causes, without any change or failure. This is a universal law.

When a soul defiles itself by committing a sin, that act of disobedience necessitates punishment for that soul. This necessary consequence can be avoided only if the soul is purified through repentance, intercession, or a good deed that necessitates an overriding forgiveness. If the punishment is revoked without any of these required means, that would be a violation of the universal law of causality. If this law is violated, then there will be no basis for anything.

(5) Satan said: "When He cursed me, why did He still give me authority over Adam's children and enable me to deceive and misguide them?" The answer to this objection should be clear based on what we said above. Obedience, acting upon the truth, and following guidance, only make

1 See the eighth paragraph under the section entitled "Back to Iblīs." (Trans.)

sense in contrast to disobedience, acting upon falsehood, and falling into misguidance. The full actualization of a call to truth hinges on the existence of some call to falsehood. If there is to be a straight path, there must be other ways that deviate from the desired destination.

Therefore, as long as there is human life and the species continues to exist through its consecutive generations, there must necessarily be a caller to falsehood who leads the people toward the punishment of hell. This means that Satan serves humankind as a species overall. Besides, the only authority that God has given him is that of calling and tempting the people, as the Qur'an states expressly[1] and also narrates from him—when he addresses the people on the Day of Resurrection.[2]

6) Satan said, "When I requested Him to respite me for such a long time, why did He grant my request?" Our answer to the last objection should clarify this question. He also said, "Clearly a world without evil would have been better." Again, as we explained above, having a world without evil and corruption means having an immaterial world. This is against the assumption that we are talking about material existence in the world of nature. It is meaningless to have a material world where there is actuality without potentiality, good without evil, gain without loss, stability without change, obedience without disobedience, or reward without punishment.

God cannot be Questioned about His Actions

It was narrated above [in al-Ālūsī's quote from the commentator of the Gospels] that God responded to Satan's objections by saying: "O Iblīs! You do not know Me! Had you known Me, you would have realized that no objection can be raised to any of My acts. For indeed I am Allah, there is no god but Me, and I am never held accountable for what I do." This is a paraphrase of what God says in the Qur'an: *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23). Apparently what is narrated from God here is a brief and general response to Satan's objections, not a detailed explanation of them one-by-one. It means that all these

1 *Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you* (15:42); *Even if Satan be calling them to the punishment of the Blaze?* (31:21). (Auth.)

2 *I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me* (14:22). (Auth.)

points mean calling God into question and objecting to His actions, but He is not liable to any question or objection, because He is God, besides Whom there is no god.

Apparently the second part of God's answer—that "I am never held accountable"—is stated as a consequence of the first part: "Indeed I am Allah, there is no god but Me." This amounts to a demonstrative argument which we can elaborate as follows: He is "God," meaning the Origin and End of everything. Therefore, one cannot ask for any other agent (*fāʿil*) or objective (*ghāyah*) to justify God's actions. He is the ultimate agent above all agents, and the final end beyond all ends. We cannot assume there to be any other agent behind God's actions, because that agent would need some power in order to act, while all power belongs to God[1]. Similarly, We cannot assume there to be any objective in God's actions besides Himself, because any objective is sought due to some good in it, while all good is in the hands of God[2].

That is why He cannot be questioned concerning what He does, because questioning an action means asking either "where did this come from" or "for what purpose was this done?" Neither of these are applicable to God because He is the cause of all causes, and the objective of all objectives. As with other agents, their power to act comes from God, and any good or interest that they gain is bestowed upon them by God, in the sense that He has set up the system of causes and means which bring one's objective to fruition. Hence, agents other than God can be questioned why they perform a certain act. The most common questions concerning one's actions pertain to the purpose of the act, meaning its aspect of good and benefit. This is especially the case with respect to voluntary acts in a social context, where the act can be described as good, bad, praiseworthy and blameworthy, according to how it serves social welfare.

What we said above is a sound explanation [of why God cannot be questioned about His acts], supported by both rational proof and scriptural evidence. The theologians, however, have differed widely on this topic due to their opposing views about whether or not the acts of God can be justified by a purpose. The Ashʿarite view is that it is possible for God to act arbitrarily, and that one can ascribe evil, sin and misfortune to Him.

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1 See verse 2:165. (Trans.)

2 See verse 3:26. (Trans.)

They hold that God can do whatever He wants, whether His act comprises of some purpose and benefit or not. Human reason cannot judge Him as it judges other agents, where reason dictates that the agent's action must include some purpose—meaning a benefit that results from that act.

The Muʿtazilite view is that it is impossible for God to do something without a purpose, because that means that God's acts can be vain and haphazard, which is certainly not true. They hold that God is not questioned concerning what He does because He is All-Wise, meaning that He bestows upon everyone and everything according to its capacity and worth. Questioning one about their acts pertains to agents whose acts may sometimes be evil, futile or random. However, since God is a wise agent, He is not questioned concerning what He does, while other agents are.

This is a lengthy debate that has continued between the scholars from the two parties and other schools for centuries. An elaborate treatment of the topic is beyond the scope of this book. However, I should bring up an important point that would help to clarify the fact of the matter in this regard.

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Two Forms of Human Knowledge

We can classify our knowledge into two kinds of propositions:

(1) There are certain propositions which do not pertain to our actions. These are descriptive statements about external truths, regardless of whether we, as individuals and societies, live and act in this world or not. Some examples are: "four is even," "one is half of two," "the world exists" and "there is a sun and a moon." These are either self-evident propositions, or analytic propositions which can be traced back to axioms and proven thereby.

(2) There are other propositions which pertain to our actions and interactions in this world. These are normative statements which are constructed through social contracts and are applicable to the human world. We rely on these principles to organize our life in the society, make plans about what we should do, and justify our voluntary acts. These propositions do not reflect the external world as a primary function, unlike the first type of propositions. It is true that we impose and implement them in the external world, but they are conventional by nature, not real. Some examples are conventional rules and guidelines that we agree upon in our social interactions, governed by titles like "manager," "head," "king,"

"owner," and so on. When we say that "Zayd is the head," we refer to a position that has been assigned a him based on social contract. It is a conventional quality (called *iʿtibārī*) which exists only in our mind, as opposed to a real attribute (called *ḥaqīqī*) which has a real referent and instance in the external world. What we have out there is only Zayd as a human. His managerial position is not like real qualities such as his height and color. "Zayd is the head" is not like "Zayd is tall" or "Zayd is black." We have mentally derived, constructed and conceptualized the title "head" for Zayd from our social institutions. We humans gather to function together because of some common need in life, and then agree to entrust the management of our affairs to Zayd. He is assigned to place everything where it belongs, and direct things according to his discretion. Seeing this setup, we conclude that the relation of Zayd to our group is that of "head" to the body. We assign this title to him in order to maintain the collective functioning of the group and benefit from it.

The title "head" only exists in our mind, not in the external world. However, we treat it as a real quality for the welfare and interest of the society. The same thing applies to all other conventional qualities and titles that we have set up to govern our social life. All of these are constructed and assigned by humans based on social contract, for the functioning of our life in this world. They do not have any corresponding reality or existence beyond the mind.

These are the two types of knowledge. The difference between them is that the first type is derived from the external world and has a real connection with it. Thus it can be called either true or false, based on whether or not it matches the external reality. "Truth" means that what we have in our mind is exactly the same as what there is in the outside, and vice versa. The second type exists only mentally, without any counterpart in the real world. However, we treat it as a real quality which corresponds to the outside world for the purpose of social welfare and interest (*maṣlaḥah*). It is hypothetically assumed to have some reality in the external world, even though it really does not.

Saying that "Zayd is the head" based on a social consideration is like saying, "Zayd is a lion" as a figurative expression or a poetic image. Calling him a "head" among people is like a poet calling him a "lion." The same can be said about anything that is conventionally constructed, including both concepts and propositions. These conventional meanings are a result

of a mental making, as opposed to being derived from the outside world and corresponding to an external reality. Nevertheless, they are based on an external reality in another sense: these titles and notion show a certain need and deficiency in humankind which has led them to construct these concepts and laws. It was due to some real material or spiritual goal that humans had to assume these meanings, in order to give direction to their activities, so that they may reach those goals and find happiness thereby.

Here is where we can see why social contracts differ from one society to another: it is because they ensue from a need for different goals. For example, there may be many actions and traits that are approved by communities near the North Pole, but not by communities near the equator. Similarly, there are differences between eastern and western societies, and between urban and rural communities. Moreover, it could be that in a single society, the majority of the people approve of something, while a minority do not. The same can be said about how social roles are viewed and defined in different societies, with respect to rich versus the poor, master versus servant, employer versus the employee, old versus young, male versus female. Meanwhile, there are some conventional laws and matters that are unanimously agreed upon by all societies, such as the necessity of having a social setup to begin with, the goodness of justice, and the evilness of injustice.

Overall, our second type of knowledge also depends on the external world, although it is not a reflection of outside reality, unlike the first type. This means that all our knowledge is based on God's action, because external reality—which is a source and point of reference for all our propositions—is a creation of God's. Therefore, when we say, "one is half of two by necessity," it means that "God has set this as a fixed relationship between one and two." Similarly, when we say that "Zayd must be respected as the head" it means that "God has created humans in a way that leads them to assume such conventions and act upon them." In the same light we can trace all statements to God's making.

This means that *any* assertion made by human reason—including theoretical reason and practical reason—is derived from the plane of divine actions and depends on that. In terms of theoretical reason, there is no difference in this regard between propositions that state a fact as a *necessity* and those that state a fact as a *possibility*. Likewise, in terms of practical reason, it does not make a difference whether the proposition

classifies something as good or evil. The rulings of practical reason are based on beneficial and harmful consequences, which are again part of God's making.

Our theoretical reason decides what is necessary, possible or impossible; and our practical reason discerns what is good or bad. However, all of these qualities are derived from the very act of God Himself. So how could our reason take precedence over Him? How could we hold God subject to the rulings of our reason? Any judgment by our reason would confine and qualify God's absolute essence. This is a most egregious injustice which some theologians [that is, the Muʿtazilites] have committed. If we let theoretical reason make statements about God, it means that God can be defined. This is impossible in the case of God, because being defined means being subject to external limits that determine the boundaries of something. It is logically impossible for anything to delimit itself; thus having defining limits means being subject to an external force, to something beyond the thing itself. Likewise, we cannot let practical reason make statements about God, because that implies that there is some deficiency in God which must be filled with the conventional laws and customs that practical reason assumes. This is based on the function of the two types of human knowledge that we explained above. The reader is encouraged to pause and reflect here.

Nevertheless, it is also a most egregious injustice if we claim that human reason has no way to understand the *acts* of God, whether His creation [of the universe] or His legislation [of religious laws]. In other words, we cannot dismiss the rulings of our theoretical reason and practical reason [which are inferred from God's creation and legislation, respectively]. We cannot make any exceptions to rational laws. We shall clarify this in two stages, according to our two types of knowledge:

(1) In terms of facts, our theoretical reason deduces certain universal laws from God's action [which is the world of existence]. That is how it proves God's existence to begin with. Now, having derived this conclusion, we cannot then turn our back to this faculty and reject its other necessary conclusions on the account that our intellect is too inferior to encompass the essence of God or comprehend His attributes. Putting a hold on theoretical reason, some theologians [that is, the Ashʿarites] have argued that God's acts are not a necessary consequence of His essence, but are only backed by His will. Some corollaries of this are: (i) God may do or not do

any given act. The doing or not doing of any given act has an absolutely equal relation to His essence. (ii) He has no purpose or objective in His acts. (iii) Both good and evil can be ascribed to Him.

The problem is that if we reject our intellect's capability of discerning and classifying God's actions [as good and bad, or possible and impossible], then we have rejected its capability of discerning God's existence in the first place. Furthermore, this implies a contradiction that is even more problematic, because it means that our rational inferences do not match the source from which they are inferred. It means that we deduce a conclusion from certain premises, then we claim that our conclusions are not applicable to those very premises. This is nothing but sophistry, which leaves no place for any kind of knowledge, and which is also counter-intuitive (it is against our *fiṭrah*). If any of God's actions or attributes could violate our rational principles, it would mean a mismatch between reason and the external world—which is an act of God, while our rational principles are deduced from the external world. If we concede that even *one* of these *certain* conclusions which are deduced by our reason could be doubted and rejected, then we must accept that *all* of our rational inferences could be wrong. This cancels human knowledge altogether, and that is the meaning of sophistry.

(2) In terms of actions, our practical and normative statements are certain laws and conventions that we mentally construct and assume in order to reach some goal and betterment in life. Any act that is conducive to that felicitous end is classified as good, and our practical reason commands to it. Any act that is an obstacle to that goal is classified as evil and wrong, and our practical reason prohibits it. In other words, what makes an act good or evil is its contribution or lack of contribution to a certain objective in life. In the first place, we come up with such classifications of good and bad because of some consideration of a certain interest or welfare. We construct our conventional statements—in the form of social laws and contracts—to serve that end in our mind. Hence, in the realm of normative knowledge, it is rather senseless to talk about any law or conventional statement that is neutral toward good and evil, or that is not backed by any objective.

When we talk about God's legislation, we are talking about the same type and nature of statements that we have in our societies. For example, when we talk about God's prescriptions, proscriptions, commands,

prohibitions, promises and warnings, they are of the same nature as human prescriptions, proscriptions, commands, prohibitions, promises and warnings. This is obvious. These are conventional meanings that our minds conceive and claim. Meanwhile, mental claims are prone to error, while God is free from that. Therefore, when He makes a legislation—which is a conventional matter with only mental existence—its aspect of uncertainty is on the side of humans only. This is much like God's statements of wish (*tamannī*) and hope (*tarajjī*): they do not indicate any uncertainty on God's part, but they show ignorance on the part of the audience. Otherwise, His legislations are like our legislations, in the sense that they pertain to humans—as social animals—that have to move from deficiency to perfection and achieve human happiness through the intermediation of their actions. This proves that God's actions in the realm of legislation are never devoid of some purpose or objective. Good and evil are also applicable to His commands and prohibitions, according to whether they lead to a benefit or a loss.

This should clarify the problem with two statements [made by the Ashʿarites]: (1) "God's legislations cannot be justified by any objective." This is like saying: "God has made a path that does not lead to any destination." The problem is that a "path" by definition is what leads to some destination, and an "intermediary" is what connects two things at its two ends. (2) "Good is whatever God commands, and evil is whatever God prohibits. Hence, if God commands something that is evil by the necessary rule of reason—such as injustice—then that would be good; and if He prohibits something that is good by the necessary rule of reason—such as justice—then that would be evil." This statement is like saying: "If God leads humankind toward their loss and perdition, then that would be their prosperity and happiness; and if He stops them from their true and eternal bliss, then that would transform bliss into wretchedness."

The Validity of Human Reason

With respect to theoretical reason, which is concerned with declarative statements, the truth is that there is some place for what human reason discerns and states about God. We ascribe to God certain qualities of perfection which we find in ourselves, such as knowledge, power and life. We also ascribe to Him the creation and direction of all beings, and affirm other qualities for Him such as mercy, forgiveness, provision, blessing and

guidance. Human reason establishes all of these for God based on demonstration. However, our qualities of perfection are limited, while God is far exalted above all limits. Any concepts is also limited, because every concept is different from other concepts, which implies a certain demarcation. This contravenes the absoluteness of God's essence. Hence, human reason complements its assertions by negating limitation from God. It admits that God is greater than being described by any description, and is far higher than being enclosed by any condition or limit. Therefore, our reason does justice to Him and brings us close to His knowledge through coupling *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism, comparison, resemblance) with *tanzīh* (transcendence, incomparability, abstraction). We quoted a few profound sermons from Imam ʿAlī which clarify and prove this point rationally in the clearest way, under our discussion of the verse, *They are certainly faithless who say, "Allah is the third [person] of a trinity"* (5:73). Readers are encouraged to consult that discussion.[1]

With respect to practical reason, which is concerned with imperative statements, there is some place for what human reason states about the legislative acts of God. However, it should be clarified that what God legislates and enacts conventionally are not because of some need on His part. Rather, they are His means of bestowing some benefit and blessing upon humankind, in order to fulfill their needs, for indeed *Allah is dispenser of a great grace* [2:105, 3:74, 8:29, 57:21, 57:29, 62:4]. Therefore, on the one hand, there is some purpose and objective behind God's legislations; while on the other hand this objective pertains to humankind, not to God. There is always some benefit that justifies God's command, but the beneficiary is humankind, not God. We explained this point above.

This means that we are entitled to inquire about the rational justification and purpose behind God's legislations, and search for their underlying good, evil, benefit or loss. However, this does not mean that human reason can impose anything on God as it imposes on humans. We cannot command or prohibit something upon God as either obligatory or forbidden, because He is absolutely needless of achieving any perfection. That is why He is not subject to any command, unlike us. We stand before Him like servants and subjects before a mighty and powerful king. All of our affairs are in His hands, including our life, death, sustenance, direction, actions, accounts, rewards and punishments. It is in this light

1 See volume 11, pp. 110ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

that He has legislated certain codes and enacted certain injunctions for us. That is why His treatment of us is entirely based on proof: There is a valid justification behind anything that He commands us; He does not accept any excuse from us unless there is a legitimate explanation for it; and all His retribution is completely justifiable. This is reflected in verses that talk about His argument against the people and the jinn on the Day of Resurrection, such as: *so that humankind may not have any argument against Allah, after the [sending of the] messengers* (4:165); *so that he who perishes might perish by a manifest proof, and he who lives may live on by a manifest proof* (8:42). This entails that from the perspective of practical reason, God's actions are according to the same criteria that apply to the acts of others, and all these are laws that He has set up Himself [as the Creator of human reason].

It is in this light that God negates all vices—that count as vices according to social conventions—from Himself in numerous verses, such as: *Indeed Allah does not wrong people in the least* (10:44); *Indeed Allah does not break His promise* (3:9); *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them for play* (44:38).

There are also many verses which confirm that the rulings of both theoretical and practical reason are applicable to divine actions:

(1) Concerning statements made by theoretical reason [which are factual statements that do not pertain to human actions] the Qur'an says: *The truth is from your Lord, so do not be among the skeptics* (3:60). The verse does not say that "the truth is *with* your Lord" because true statements and facts are rather inferred *from* His acts. Unlike the case of our deeds, God's actions do not *follow* the truth as a source of their legitimacy. Another verse is: *Allah judges, and there is none who may repeal His judgement* (13:41). This means that He has absolute authority to judge, without any rational impediment or any other impediment that may qualify His judgment. All impediments and qualifications are rather *a result of* His acts, which makes them subsequent to His acts. God's actions are not subject to the influence or authority of anything that takes precedence over them. The Qur'an also says: *He is the One, the All-Paramount* (13:16); *Allah has [full] command of His affairs* (12:21); *Indeed Allah carries through His command* (65:3). He is the All-Paramount, the Defeater, and the Executer that is not overcome by anything, is not defeated in any matter, and cannot be stopped from anything by any opposing barrier. Another verse is:

Look! All creation and command belong to Him (7:54). There are also many other verses in this regard that are stated in an absolute way, without being qualified by any condition.

It is true that human reason can inquire about the details and unknown aspects of divine acts, but this is not because of God being subject to rational justifications. Rather, it is because all rational laws are deduced from external reality, which is nothing but God's action and behavior. He is not a follower, but a leader and source of all rational principles. This can be confirmed by the numerous verses which urge the people to think, remember, contemplate, and investigate about God's actions [that is, the world of creation]. If our reason were not valid and applicable in this regard, then these verses would be meaningless.[1]

(2) Concerning statements made by practical reason [which pertain to human actions] the Qur'an says: *O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Messenger when he summons you to that which will give you life* (8:24). This verse shows that there is a benefit in acting upon the divine law, and that is the resulting happy life. Another verse is: *Say, "Indeed Allah does not enjoin indecencies"* (7:28). This verse clearly shows that there are certain

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1 The distinction between *thubūt* (existence, subsistence) and *ithbāt* (affirmation, proof) would help better understand this discussion. *Thubūt* pertains to the field of ontology; *ithbāt* pertains to epistemology. The latter is necessarily subsequent to the former and is deduced from it, and therefore can never rule over it. God's actions are absolute and unsurpassed at the level of *thubūt*, because nothing else exists to serve as a criterion for His acts. The existence of anything is itself an act of God. Anything that our reason comprehends is our cognition and establishment (*ithbāt*) of the world of existence (*thubūt*). Our proofs and arguments (at the level of *ithbāt*) are deduced from external realities that are created by God (at the level of *thubūt*). This is why our reason cannot determine or dictate what God ought to do, or whether His actions are good or not, because all our notions of "ought to" and "good" are themselves deduced from the world of creation, which is an act of God. *He is not questioned concerning what He does* (21:23). Nevertheless, having proven that God is the Absolute Truth, we can assert that His acts are all true and good, not on an arbitrary basis, but according to the reality of truth and goodness, which is His essence. *That is because Allah is the Truth* (22:6, 22:62, 31:30); *The truth is from your Lord* (2:147, 3:60). That is why our notions of true and good are also valid, because they are derived from the acts of God. This goes as far as our decisive and necessary statements, within the limitations of our reason. (Trans.)

things which are inherently indecent, and God does not enjoin them. This is diametrically against the idea that if God enjoined them, then they would no longer be indecent. There are many other verses which justify a commandment—such as prayer, fasting, charity and jihad—by stating their underlying benefit and gain. The Qur'an is so replete with these verses that we feel no need to quote them. One example is: *Do not associate any partners with Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice* (31:13).[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam Ṣādiq said: The angels were under the impression that Iblīs was one of them, but it was inscribed in God's knowledge that he was not. God disclosed what was hidden in his soul when he said arrogantly: *You created me from fire and You created him from clay* (7:12).[2]

(2) [Imam] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad narrated from his father, from his grandfather, that the Messenger of God said: "The first person to apply *qiyās* (reasoning by analogy, comparison) in religious matters according to his personal opinion was Iblīs. God commanded him, 'Prostrate yourself to Adam,' but he said: *'I am better than him. You created me from fire and You created him from clay'* (7:12)." [Imam] Jaʿfar then added: "So whoever applies his

1 The author's long discussion above was a response to the long-lasting dispute between the Ashʿarite and Muʿtazilite theologians concerning the idea that *He is not questioned concerning what He does* (21:23). In short, divine actions are not subject to any judgment, because any rational principle or essential value that we may have is itself deduced from God's actions. Nevertheless, God, as a perfect being, is Wise, and the acts that emanate from His wise essence are all purposeful and calculated. Even though He does whatever He wishes without being subject to any question, He never acts in a random or whimsical way. This can be summarized by two divine qualities that are often used together in the Qur'an: *al-ʿAzīz* (the All-Mighty) and *al-Ḥakīm* (the All-Wise). His might refers to His aspect of power and dominance, which is emphasized by the Ashʿarites, while His wisdom refers to His aspect of justice, which is emphasized by the Muʿtazilites. Hence we can reconcile the two views. Overall, we can hold the Ashʿarite view, with one clarification: that there is always some wisdom in what God does, even though we may not know what that is. All His actions are right, good and just, and that is why He is not liable to any question. (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Dāwūd b. Farqad.

personal opinion to make comparison in religious matters, God will couple him with Iblīs on the Day of Judgment, for the person has followed Iblīs in performing *qiyās*."[1]

(3) Once Abū Ḥanīfah went to see Imam al-Ṣādiq. The Imam told him, "O Abū Ḥanīfah, I have been told that you exercise *qiyās* (reasoning by analogy, comparison)."
He confirmed, "That is right, I do *qiyās*."
The Imam admonished him, "Do not do *qiyās*, for indeed the first one who did *qiyās* was Iblīs, where he said: *You created me from fire and You created him from clay* (7:12)."[2]

(4) Imam ᶜAlī said: Indeed Iblīs was the first one to disbelieve, and thus *kufr* (disbelief, infidelity, heresy) was initiated.[3]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The first sin which came out of *anāniyyah* (egotism, selfhood; lit. "I-ness") was from Iblīs.[4]

Author's comment: We discussed this idea in our exposition above.

(6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Pride was the first disobedience against God.[5]

Author's comment: Pride also traces back to *anāniyyah*, as per our exposition above. Therefore this hadith matches the one before it.

(7) Imam ᶜAlī said in a sermon about the creation of Adam: God demanded from the angels what He had entrusted them and requested His previous injunction to them: to submit to prostrating before him and humbling themselves in order to honor him. Thus He said: *Prostrate before Adam. They prostrated, but not Iblīs* (2:34, 7:11, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116) and his hosts: self-importance withheld them and wretchedness overcame them…[6]

Author's comment: This sermon shows that the command to prostrate before Adam included not only Iblīs, but also his hosts.[7] This confirms

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Nuᶜaym's *al-Ḥulyah* and al-Daylamī.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ᶜĪsá b. ᶜAbd-Allāh al-Qurashī.

3 *Al-ᶜUyūn*. This has also been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Tafsīr al-ᶜAyyāshī*.

4 *ᶜIlal al-sharāʾiᶜ*, part of a longer hadith.

5 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

6 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

7 This is based on the plural pronoun "them" in the last part of the quote above.

what we said above, that Adam in this story is a representative of all humanity. The story is not limited to him as a specific individual in history. It also confirms the idea that the story is about the *takwīn* (creation, makeup) of humankind.[1]

(8) Concerning verse 7:17 (*Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left*) Imam al-Bāqir said: *From their front*: I will belittle the hereafter to them. *And from their rear*: I will order them to accumulate wealth and not pay their obligatory dues, so that their wealth may remain for their children. *And from their right*: I will ruin their religion by decorating errors and adorning doubts for them. *And their left*: by promoting pleasures and making lusts conquer their hearts.[2]

(9) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: By the One Who sent Muḥammad [as His Messenger], the devils and demons that attack a believer are more than the bees that gather around a piece of meat.[3]

(10) Imam al-Riḍā said: Satan is called Iblīs because he has despaired (*ublisa*)[4] from God's mercy.[5]

However, this is apparently a mistake in transcription. The sermon has also been reported with a singular pronoun "him" and without the addition of "his hosts." This reading is more consistent with the rest of the sermon, which refers to Iblīs alone using singular pronouns. Nevertheless, it does not negate the author's generalization of the command to include Satan's hosts, especially given his symbolic interpretation of the story. (Trans.)

1 That is, the story is meant to depict the two opposing forces of good and evil that humans face. It is not about a legislative or authoritative command directed at the angels and Satan. In other words, God's command and their prostration should not be taken literally. (Trans.)

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

3 *Tafsīr al-ᶜAyyāshī*.

4 This refers to God's curse upon him until the Day of Resurrection, as stated in verses 15:35 and 38:78. It does not refer to an act of giving up hope in God's mercy by Satan, but only indicates his utmost wretchedness, to the extent that there is no hope of his deliverance. Although narrations like this are apparently about the etymological roots of the terms, they often involve other layers of meaning. Therefore, the above narration does not necessarily negate the derivation of the word Iblīs from *diabolus* in Greek, not to mention that some of these languages may trace back to common roots. (Trans.)

5 *Maᶜānī al-akhbār*.

(11) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about Adam's garden: "Was it a garden in this world or in the hereafter?"[1] The Imam replied, "It was one of the gardens of this world, where the sun and the moon shone. If it were one of the gardens of the hereafter, he would never leave it."[2] *Tafsīr al-Qummī* adds: Then God settled Adam in the garden and made everything lawful to him except the forbidden tree. That was because his creation was such that in order to survive, he required command, prohibition, food, clothes, shelter and sex. He did not know his benefit and loss except through God's instruction and aid. Then Iblīs went to him and said, "If you two eat of this tree—which God has forbidden you—you will turn into angels and remain in this garden forever. But if you do not eat of it, then God will expel you from the garden." He swore to them that he is giving them sincere advice, as God narrates from him: *"Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree lest you should become angels, or lest you become immortal." And he swore to them, "I am indeed your well-wisher"* (7:21-22). Adam took his word for it, and there happened what God describes: *their shameful parts became exposed to them* (7:22). That is, the heavenly garments that God had clothed them with fell off from them, so they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden. Then *their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you that Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?"* (7:22). They replied as God narrates: *"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves! If You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers"* (7:23). God responded to them: *"Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for some time"* (7:24) which refers to the Day of Resurrection.

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: When Adam was expelled from the garden, Gabriel came to him and said, "Adam! Didn't God create you with His own hand? Didn't He breathe into you of His own spirit? Didn't He make the angels prostrate before you? Didn't He marry you His bondwoman Eve? Didn't He settle you in the

1 This is about the nature and kind of the garden. (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

garden? Didn't He directly prohibit you from eating of that one tree, while making the rest of the garden lawful to you? So how could you eat of it and disobey God?" Adam replied, "Gabriel, Satan swore by God that he is my well-wisher. I didn't know that anyone of God's creatures may swear by God falsely."[1]

Author's comment: We also presented many narrations about this story in Sūrah al-Baqarah [under verses 2:30-39]. We will quote more later on in its appropriate place, by God's will.

(13) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Iblīs complained to God, "My Lord! How can this be?! You are All-Just and never wrong anyone. Now will the reward of all my acts [of worship] be void?" "No," God replied. "Request from Me whatever you want in this world as a reward for your deeds, and I shall grant you."

The first thing that he asked for was to live until the Day of Judgment. God said, "Granted."

He demanded, "Give me dominance over Adam's descendants." God said, "Granted."[2]

He asked, "Make me diffuse through them as blood diffuses through their veins." God said, "I will perfuse you [as you requested]."

He demanded, "For any child that is born to them, two shall be born for me. I shall be able to see them but they should not be

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm.

2 This may sound contrary to what the Qur'an narrates from Satan, where he addresses the wrongdoers on the Day of Resurrection: *I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me* (14:22). The verse does not reject Iblīs's authority outright. It actually proves that Iblīs has as much authority as calling, tempting, and provoking humankind, but not more than that. Previously we read from the author: "The only authority that God has given him is that of calling and tempting the people, as the Qur'an states expressly [in verses 15:42 and 31:21] and also narrates from him—when he addresses the people on the Day of Resurrection [in verse 14:22]." He also adds below: "The control and authority that the devils have over humans is inasmuch as tempting and deceiving them. Once one falls for their temptation and deception, they take control of the person as they wish." The ultimate answer is that there are different degrees of authority. The apparently contradictory verses and narrations in this regard pertain to different levels of authority. Some are affirmed about Iblīs and some are rejected. (Trans.)

> able to see me. I shall be able to appear to them in any form that I want." God said, "Granted."
> Then he said, "My Lord! Give me more!" God replied, "I will make their breasts a home for you and your descendants."
> Satan said, "That is all I want, My Lord!" At that point Satan said: *By Your might, I will surely pervert them all, except Your chosen servants among them* (38:82-83).[1]

Author's comment: What we said above in the exposition of the verse should clarify the meaning of this hadith. His request that "I shall be able to appear to them in any form that I want" means that he can manipulate our senses and cognitive faculty such that we see him in any form that he wants. It does not imply that he can transform his substance and essence. Some scholars have said,

Muslim scholars unanimously agree that Iblīs and his descendants are of the jinn, and the jinn are ethereal bodies made of air, which can take any form including the forms of dogs and pigs. The angels are also ethereal bodies that can transform into anything except for dogs and pigs.

Apparently what is meant by this claim is essential transformation of the jinn and the angels. This, however, is not supported by any decisive rational or transmitted proof. The claimed consensus (*ijmāʿ*) does not prove it either, because it reduces to unanimity in *interpretation* [as opposed to unanimity in *transmission*, which is where consensus could be credible, if at all]. Even if it is ascertained that such consensus really exists, it will not be an authoritative proof in such discussions, let alone a merely claimed consensus. As we have said before, only the Qur'an and the sunnah would be valid transmitted sources in these matters [which pertain to beliefs and roots of religion, as opposed to its practices and branches].

Another subject is the issue of Satan's descendants and their number. All we can say is that they are abundant in number, and they have ensued from Iblīs himself. But we do not know how. It could be through procreation as in humans, or through laying eggs, or through another channel. We have no way to know. This is among things that remain unknown to us.

Here is a list of what some scholars have narrated:

(1) Satan copulates with himself and lays eggs.
(2) He has the male organ on one thigh and the female organ on the other, which he uses to mate with himself.
(3) He gives birth to ten children every day.

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, part of a longer hadith.

(4) All of his children are male, and there is no intermarriage between them.

(5) They marry and procreate as animals mate.

There is no evidence to support any of these, except for some solitary reports that are weak in terms of their authenticity (called *ḍaᶜīf*), with incomplete chains of narration from the Prophet (called *mursal*), or chains of narration that end with the Prophet's Companions (called *mawqūf*) or their Followers (called *maqṭūᶜ*). In discussions of this sort [which pertain to beliefs and roots of religion], we can only rely on a Qur'anic verse with a decisive meaning (*muḥkam*) or a narration that is either mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) or otherwise accompanied by some decisive indication (*qarīnah qaṭᶜiyyah*). Nor can we verify these reports by matching them with the Qur'an, because they have no clear Qur'anic equivalent.

(14) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Every heart has two ears. Next to one of them there is an angel who guides [the person] to rectitude. And next to the other one there is a devil who tempts and deceives [the individual]. One commands and the other prohibits: the devil commands to sins, and the angel prohibits from it. That is the meaning of God's words: *seated on the right hand and on the left: he says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him* (50:17-18).[1]

(15) The Messenger of God said: Indeed Satan runs through the children of Adam like blood.[2]

(16) The Prophet said: "Everyone has been tied to his companion from the jinn [that is, a devil]." The Companions inquired, "Even you, Messenger of God?" He said, "Even I, except that God assisted me against him until he surrendered (*aslama*). Thus he only commands me to good."[3]

Author's comment: Some scholars have read this hadith with *aslama* (he surrendered) and some have read it with *aslamu* (I am secure).

(17) Jamīl b. Darrāj says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about Iblīs, "Was he one of the angels? Or was he in charge of some part of the celestial matters?"

The Imam replied, "He was not one of the angels. The angels used

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of ᶜAlī b. Ibrāhīm, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr, on the authority of Ḥammād.

2 *Biḥār al-anwār*, on the authority of *Shihāb al-akhbār*.

3 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, on the authority of Ibn Masᶜūd.

to think that he was one of them, but it was inscribed in God's [eternal] knowledge that he is not one of them. He was not in charge of anything in the celestial realms, and did not hold any position that is worthy of honor."

Then I [Jamīl] went to al-Ṭayyār and told him about what I had heard. He denied that and said, "How could he not be one of the angels when God says to the angels: *'Prostrate before Adam.' So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblīs* (7:11)?" So al-Ṭayyār went to see the Imam and ask him about this, and I was there with him. The Imam explained: "When God addresses the believers in several places by *O you who have faith*, does this address also include the hypocrites?" He said, "Yes, it also includes the hypocrites and those who err; it includes anyone who apparently attests to faith."[1]

Author's comment: This hadith refutes the claimed narrations which say that Iblīs was one of the angels, that he was a guardian in the fifth heaven, or that he was one of the guardians of Paradise.

There are countless narrations through both Shia and Sunni chains of transmission about Satan's works. These can be classified into two groups: some only state what he does without any explanation, while others also provide some explanation. The next seven reports [from number 18 to 24] are of the first type.

(18) Imam ʿAlī said [narrating from the Prophet]: Do not keep a cloth bag of meat inside the home, because that is a place for the Devil. Do not gather dust behind the door [of homes] because that is where the Devil will reside.[2]

(19) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: On top of every bridge there is a devil. Whenever you get there say, "In the name of God (*bism Allāh*)" and it will retreat from you.[3]

(20) The Messenger of God said: The home of Satan in your homes is the cobwebs.[4]

(21) Either Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Do not drink while standing. Do not urinate in standing water. Do not defecate at any grave. Do not stay alone in a house. Do not walk with a single

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Imam ʿAlī.

shoe. For indeed Satan gets a hold of a servant fastest when he is in one of these conditions.[1]

(22) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: If one names God [at the time of intercourse] Satan withdraws. If one engages in the act [of intercourse] without naming God, Satan will insert his male organ [in the middle] and the act will occur from both of them, although there will be only one seed [which is attributable to the man].[2]

(23) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: Whatever is purchased by unlawful money is Satan's part.[3]

(24) There is a hadith [from the Prophet] which says: Whoever sleeps drunk, sleeps as Satan's *ʿarūs* (groom, bride).

Author's comment: The Qur'an says: *Indeed wine, gambling, idols and the divining arrows are abominations of Satan's doing* (5:90). This verse is also among the first type of reports [which mention Satan's doing without further elaboration]. The following five hadiths [from number 25 to 29] are of the second type [which provide some explanation for what is meant by Satan's acts].

(25) Imam al-Bāqir said: Anger is indeed an ember from Satan, which kindles in the heart of Adam's children.[4]

(26) The Prophet said: Indeed Satan flows through the children of Adam like blood. So constrict his vessels by hunger.

(27) Imam ʿAlī said: His [Satan's] kohl is sleep; his pulverized medicine is anger; and his liquid medicine[5] is lie.[6]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*.

2 *Al-Kāfī*.

3 The author has assumed this to be a hadith, but it is not. The statement refers to the verse 17:64, where God says to Satan: *and share with them in wealth and children*. The previous hadith also refers to the same verse. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kāfī*.

5 Another version of the hadith says *saʿūṭ* (medicine administered through the nose) instead of *safūf* (pulverized medicine), which makes the hadith more coherent. A more modern rendition of the three items would be: "eyewash, nasal drops, and medicinal syrup." There is remarkable literary elegance in identifying the organs where these acts appear as the entrances of Satan's remedy. In light of the ʿAllāmah's discussions on Satan, the hadith is saying: "Torpor, anger and lying are ways of supporting the evil force which pulls us toward darkness and distances us from the Truth." (Trans.)

6 *Biḥār al-anwār*, on the authority of *al-Maḥāsin*, on the authority of Imam

(28) It is narrated that once Prophet Moses saw Satan while he was wearing a *burnus* (tall hat or hooded robe worn by ascetics). Prophet Moses inquired him about his hat. He replied, "With it I ensnare the hearts of Adam's children."

(29) Imam al-Riḍā narrated from his fathers: Iblīs visited the prophets from the time of Adam until when God sent the Messiah. He would talk to them and ask them questions. Among all of them, he was most intimate with John son of Zechariah. Once John told him, "O Abā Murrah [Satan's *kunyah* (title)]! I have a request from you." Satan said, "You are so great that I would never decline your request. Ask me whatever you wish, for indeed I will never oppose what you want."

"Abā Murrah! I want you to show me the snares and tethers by which you catch the children of Adam."

"With pleasure," Satan replied. "It will be an honor!" So he promised to do so the next day. Next morning John stayed home, firmly locked up the door, and waited for Satan to show up at his rendezvous. It was not long before Satan appeared in front of him through the window. He had the face of a monkey and the body of a pig. His eyes opened vertically. His teeth and mouth also opened vertically on a single bone, without having a chin or beard. He had four hands: two extending from his chest and two from his shoulders. His heels were in the front and his toes were behind. He was wearing a cloak, fastened with a belt at his waist, with strings of all different colors—like red, yellow and green—hanging from it. He was holding a great bell in his hand. He was wearing a helmet, and there was a piece of iron, like a hook, hanging from it.

After studying him thoroughly, John asked, "What is this belt at your waist?"

Satan said, "This is *majūsiyyah* (dualism, paganism).[1] I'm the one who founded it and made it appealing to the people."

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al-Riḍā, from his fathers, as a part of a longer hadith.

1 One of the meanings of *majūsiyyah*, as used in verse 22:17, is Zoroastrianism or Magianism, which is apparently listed among divinely revealed religions. However, sometimes the term is used in a more general sense to indicate deviation from monotheism, not Zoroastrianism or any other religion in particular. (Trans.)

John asked, "What are these colorful threads?"
"These are all colors that women use. A woman tries them one after another until she finds one that matches her pigment. Thus are people tempted with these colors [or with her]."
"What is this bell in your hand?"
"This represents all [auditory] pleasures like *ṭanbūr* (the bandore), *barbaṭ* (the lute), *miʿzafah* (the psaltery), *ṭabl* (the drum), *nāy* (the pipe) and *ṣurnāy* (the oboe).[1] When people meet up to drink, they don't enjoy the wine [as they should] until I ring this bell among them. When they hear the music, they erupt in ecstasy, where some start dancing, some snap their fingers, and some tear their clothes." John asked, "What is the most delightful [of these snares] to you?" "Women," Satan replied. "They are my snares and tithers. Whenever I am overwhelmed by the prayers of the righteous people and their cursing of me, I turn to women and that soothes my soul."[2]
John asked, "What is this helmet on your head?"
"This is my protection against the imprecations of the believers."
John asked, "What is this hook that I see on it?"
"With this I overturn the hearts of the righteous."
John asked, "Have you ever gained the upper hand over me, even for a moment?"
Satan replied, "No, but you have a trait that I like!"
"And what is that?"
"You're a crapulous man. When you break your fast [at the end of the day], you eat to satiation, and that sometimes prevents you from part of your night vigil and prayers."

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1 These are traditional eastern musical instruments which do not have exact English equivalents. The first three are stringed instruments; *ṭabl* is a percussion instrument; and the last two are wind instruments. (Trans.)

2 That is: "I can tempt righteous men and break their resistance with women." ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī says in a mystical lyric:

The love of the dears tends to take away
One's heart and faith, and anything that you say.
The rook (*rukh*) of chess cannot ever win
What a lovely face (*rukh*) can win and take away.

For the full poem see Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Shining Sun* (London: ICAS Press, 2011), pp. 63-64. (Trans.)

John stated, "I take a solemn vow with God to never eat to satiation anymore until I meet Him."
"And I make a solemn vow with God," Satan retorted, "to never give advice to a Muslim [that is, a believer] until I meet Him." Then he left and never went back to visit John.[1]

Author's comment: This account has been narrated in a more elaborate way through Sunni chains of transmission. There are also other narrations about Satan's meetings and conversations with Prophets Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. As we said before, there are countless narrations through both Shia and Sunni chains of transmission about the types of Satan's temptations and the variety of ways by which he makes different sins appealing to people. It is more than clear that the descriptions mentioned in these narrations are all symbolic representations that match various sins in terms of their quality and form. They are like the images that one sees in a dream according to one's circumstances and beliefs.

If we reflect on the second type of narrations quoted above [from number 25 to 29, which provide some explanation for what is meant by Satan's acts], we can infer that narrations of the first type [from number 18 to 24, which do not provide any explanation] point to a link that exists between Satan and a certain thing, where he employs it as an instrument for temptation and deception in relevant circumstances. What we should emphasize is that all these are imaginal embodiments (*tajassumāt mithāliyyah*)[2] that represent a certain act or thing, not a physical embodiment, as thought by the literalists (*ḥashwiyyah*) and some scholars of hadith. For instance, they would interpret the above narration as follows: "While *majūsiyyah* (dualism, paganism) is a belief system among humans, it is at the same time a leather belt that Satan wears." They would also conclude that Satan really transforms into other beings with all their faculties, and becomes a member of that species—sometimes a human, sometimes an animal, and sometimes an inanimate object. Alternatively, they would say that Iblīs to these species is like matter (*māddah*) to form (*ṣurah*), where matter can assume different forms [and thus be actualized as a different species]. However, the narrations are completely foreign to

1 Al-Ṭūsī's *al-Majālis*.

2 This means the representation of a reality in the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), where existents do not have matter, but have the properties of matter like shape and form. A good example of it would be the forms that one observes in a dream. (Trans.)

such possibilities.

There are numerous narrations in this regard, which proves their authenticity as a group, but not individually. Likewise, the Qur'an confirms their overall idea, which is that Satan appears to our senses in various forms. This is what we can say about these narrations collectively. As with each narration individually, it should first be authenticated. Even if it is found to have an authentic chain of narration—which is not the case about all of them—then it would be a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*), and we cannot rely on solitary reports to infer our beliefs and roots of religion. At most it can be used in Islamic law, where a jurist may infer from it that a certain act is either *mustaḥabb* (recommended) or *makrūh* (reprehensible, disapproved).

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Verses 26-36

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يا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنا عَلَيْكُمْ لِباساً يُوارِي سَوْآتِكُمْ وَ رِيشاً وَ لِباسُ التَّقْوى
ذلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذلِكَ مِنْ آياتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ يا بَنِي آدَمَ لا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ
الشَّيْطانُ كَما أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنْزِعُ عَنْهُما لِباسَهُما لِيُرِيَهُما سَوْآتِهِما
إِنَّهُ يَراكُمْ هُوَ وَ قَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لا تَرَوْنَهُمْ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّياطِينَ أَوْلِياءَ لِلَّذِينَ
لا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَ إِذا فَعَلُوا فاحِشَةً قالُوا وَجَدْنا عَلَيْها آباءَنا وَ اللَّهُ أَمَرَنا بِها قُلْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشاءِ أَ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ ما لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي
بِالْقِسْطِ وَ أَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَ ادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ كَما
بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ فَرِيقاً هَدى وَ فَرِيقاً حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الضَّلالَةُ إِنَّهُمُ اتَّخَذُوا
الشَّياطِينَ أَوْلِياءَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ يا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا
زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَ كُلُوا وَ اشْرَبُوا وَ لا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(7:26) *O Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you garments to cover your shameful parts, and adornments. Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is better. That is [one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition.*

(7:27) *O Children of Adam! Do not let Satan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose to them their shameful parts. Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them. We have indeed made the devils guardians of those who have no faith.*

(7:28) *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and Allah has enjoined it upon us." Say, "Indeed Allah does not enjoin indecencies. Do you attribute to Allah what you do not know?"*

(7:29) *Say, "My Lord has enjoined justice," and [He has enjoined,] "Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship, and invoke*

Him, putting your exclusive faith in Him. Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return."

(7:30) *A part [of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part, for they took devils for guardians instead of Allah, and supposed they were guided.*

(7:31) *O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every place of worship, and eat and drink, but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful.*

(7:32) *Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?" Say, "These are, on the Day of Resurrection, exclusively for the faithful in the life of this world." Thus do We elaborate the communications for a people who have knowledge.*

(7:33) *Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones, and sin and undue aggression, and that you should ascribe to Allah partners for which He has not sent down any authority, and that you should attribute to Allah what you do not know."*

(7:34) *There is a [preordained] time for every nation: when their time comes, they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it.*

(7:35) *O Children of Adam! If there come to you messengers from among yourselves, recounting to you My communications, then those who are Godwary and righteous will have no fear, nor will they grieve.*

(7:36) *But those who deny Our communications and are disdainful of them, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it [forever].*

Introduction

The previous section was a detailed account of the story of prostration and Adam's garden, which is also elaborately discussed in Sūrah al-Baqarah [2:30-39]. The same story is mentioned concisely in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā [20:115-116]. Matching these verses together, we can deduce, after some contemplation, that whereas the verses in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā are addressed to Adam specifically, the current set of verses generalize them to all his descendants, where the verses begin with: *O Children of Adam*. This

complies with what we saw in the previous section, where the story was presented in a more general way [than in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā].

There are four verses here which begin with: *O Children of Adam*. Three of them [verses 26, 27 and 31] generalize God's initial addresses to Adam in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā. There He warns Adam against Satan's temptations and tell him about being provided with food, drink and clothes in the garden: *We said, "O Adam! This is indeed an enemy of yours and your mate's. So do not let him expel you from paradise, or you will be miserable. Indeed you will neither be hungry in it nor naked. Indeed you will neither be thirsty in it, nor suffer from the sun"* (20:117-119). The fourth verse [7:35] generalizes a subsequent verse in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *Then, should any guidance come to you from Me…* (20:123).

Therefore, God's initial directives to Adam [in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā] are generalized to all his descendants [here], and from them the verses conclude a set of laws and instructions. This shows that what is legislated here in concise and general terms are universal commands that are part of all religions without any exception [because they are equally extended to all descendants of Adam]. We can also deduce that the general laws that govern the life and afterlife of any person, including the determinents of their felicity or wretchedness, stem from that initial story [of Adam]. Hence, the story of Adam [mentioned in the previous set of verses] is the root, and the laws and system [mentioned in the current set of verses] are its branches. The story of Adam is like a table of contents which presents the elaborate discussions that are to follow.

Commentary

يا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنا عَلَيْكُمْ لِباساً يُوارِي سَوْآتِكُمْ وَ رِيشاً وَ لِباسُ التَّقْوى
ذلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذلِكَ مِنْ آياتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(7:26) ***O Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you garments*** **(libāsan)** ***to cover your shameful parts, and adornments*** **(rīshan).** ***Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is*** *better*. ***That is [one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition.***

Libās is "something that can be worn to cover the body." It is originally constructed as a verbal noun: *labisa*, *yalbasu*, *labsan*, *libsan* and *libāsan* [where the last three terms are verbal nouns, meaning "wearing,

clothing"]. *Rīsh* means "something that is beautiful." It is derived from the "feathers" (*rīsh*) of birds in the sense that their beauty and adornment. *Rīsh* is also used for appliances and furniture.

Apparently what is meant by "sending down" garments and adornments is "creating" them. The same usage is seen elsewhere in the Qur'an: *and We sent down iron, in which there is great might and uses* (57:25); *and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle* (39:6). This is based on the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21). It means that God has "sent down" garments and adornments from some hidden source that is "with Him" to the visible world. This process is called *khalq* (creation) [in its etymological sense, which means *taqdīr* (measurement)].

Garments are a product of human manufacturing and fabrication, but not their primary material such as cotton, wool and silk. We extract, spin, weave, sew and cut these things until we make garments out of them which are suitable for wearing. Hence, garments and adornments are produced by humans, yet the verse attributes them to God. This attribution is similar to the verse: *but Allah has created you and whatever you make* (37:96).

The existence of anything traces to God and can be attributed to Him, whether that thing occurs through human activity, or occurs through other means and instruments, including the essential properties of different species like the growing of plants from the earth, the yellow color of gold, and the sweetness of honey. All means and instruments, including all their properties and impacts, trace back to God, Who encompasses all of their existential properties.

Meanwhile, not all events can be called "created" in the same sense. Everything goes back to God except the aspects of deficiency, evil and sin in His creation, because these things are in fact a *lack* of creation of good, or a *violation* of God's command. Hence, they are not created [as things that are brought to existence primarily]. Rather, they are aspects of some deficiency in human deeds, whether inward or outward. We have repeatedly discussed this idea in different places in this book.[1]

The verse describes the purpose of garments as: *to cover your shameful parts*. This refers to the need which makes humans go after clothes: to cover their body parts which would be shameful to them to reveal. As

1 See volume 3, pp. 243-244 (under verses 2:216-218), and volume 9, pp. 13ff (under verses 4:77-80) of the English translation. (Trans.)

with adornment, humans go after them to embellish themselves, which is something beyond the primary need for clothing. This verse implies God's favor upon humans for guiding them to manufacture garments and adornments. As some exegetes have said, we can also infer from this verse that it is permissible to wear clothes for beauty.

***Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is better. That is [one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition*:** Here the verse makes a transition from physical garments to a spiritual garment. The former cover the body parts that would make one ashamed if they are revealed. Similarly, the latter covers inner defects that would make one ashamed if they are revealed. These defects include polytheism and all other sins. This spiritual garment is Godwariness, which is God's advice and command to us.

The psychological pain and humiliation that one suffers due to a disclosure of any defect—whether that is physical or spiritual—is of the same nature. However, the appearance of inner defects is more intense, bitter and lasting, because then one has to face God and be accountable to Him, and because they result in a fire *which will overspread the hearts* (104:7). This is why the garment of Godwariness *is better* than the physical garments.

… That is [one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition: This sentence complements the previous part of the verse. It means that the physical garment is a sign of God. We must reflect on the fact that we have some private parts which we should cover with clothes, because their disclosure would grieve us. Then we should infer that we also have some spiritual defects that we must cover, because their disclosure would grieve us in like manner. We will then realize that we must, *a fortiori*, cover these hidden defects. These defects are our moral vices and evil habits, and the garment that we need to cover them is the garment of Godwariness. This is what God has commanded us, and has explained it to us through the tongue of His prophets. This garment is necessary for us to remove our [spiritual] need.

Here is a list of how other exegetes have interpreted *the garment of Godwariness*:

(1) It means belief and good deeds.
(2) It means having a decent appearance as a righteous person.
(3) It means *ḥayā*ʾ (shame, modesty).
(4) It means the garment of worship and asceticism, which is typically

coarse woolen clothes.

(5) It means Islam.

(6) It means what is worn in battles.

(7) It means anything that covers the private parts.

(8) It means fear of God.

(9) It means what the Godwary will wear on the Day of Resurrection. That is better than all garments in this world.

The readers would certainly agree that none of these views is quite concordant with the context and flow of the verse.

يا بَنِي آدَمَ لا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطانُ كَما أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنْزِعُ عَنْهُما لِباسَهُما لِيُرِيَهُما سَوْآتِهِما إِنَّهُ يَراكُمْ هُوَ وَ قَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لا تَرَوْنَهُمْ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّياطِينَ أَوْلِياءَ لِلَّذِينَ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(7:27) ***O Children of Adam! Do not let Satan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose to them their shameful parts. Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them. We have indeed made the devils guardians of those who have no faith.***

The repetition of *O Children of Adam* at the beginning of this verse makes it independent of the last verse, but semantically it follows the same thread—as we can see, there is again reference made to shameful parts. The meaning is: "You humans have some shameful parts that can only be covered by the garment of Godwariness, and We have dressed you in this garment by the innate makeup and creation (*fiṭrah*) that We have given you. So beware lest Satan deceives you and takes away this garment from you, as he took it away from your parents in the garden, in order to expose to them their shameful parts. Indeed We have made the devils guardians over those who follow them and do not believe in Our signs."

This means that what Satan did to Adam and Eve in the garden—that is, *stripping them of their garments to expose to them their shameful parts*—symbolizes what he does to all humans: he strips them of their innate garment of Godwariness through temptation. Hence, all individuals are in the "garden of felicity" as long as they do not fall for this temptation. Once they fall for Satan's deception, God expels them from that garden.

… Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see

them…: This sentence emphasizes the previous warning. It says that Satan's work is so subtle that one does not realize it, and so hidden that one does not sense it. One only sees oneself in the process, without realizing that there is another being or force beyond him who commands him to do evil and leads him toward wretchedness.

… We have indeed made the devils guardians of those who have no faith: This is another emphasis on the previous prohibition. The control and authority that the devils have over humans is inasmuch as tempting and deceiving them. Once one falls for their temptation and deception, they take control of the person as they wish. This is seen in God's addresses to Iblīs: *"Entice whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, and share with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them!" But Satan promises them nothing but delusion. "As for My servants, you shall have no authority over them." And your Lord suffices as trustee* (17:64-65); *Indeed he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord* (16:99); *Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you* (15:42). Matching these verses with the current verse, we can deduce that the devils have no authority over the believers, although they may sometimes be tempted by the devils. Satan has no authority over those believers who trust in God [16:99], who are described as *My servants* in the other verse [17:65]. This means that Satan's authority only encompasses those who do not believe.

What is meant by "lack of faith" here is not simply atheism or polytheism [which includes passive unbelief], but it is *rejecting* the signs and communications of God [actively and deliberately]. This is a more specific and restricted meaning than the general sense of unbelief. Our evidence for this specific interpretation is found in God's addresses to humankind in this story: *We said, "Get down from it, all together! Then, should any guidance come to you from Me… But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it [forever]"* (2:38-39); *But those who deny Our communications and are disdainful of them, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it [forever]* (7:36).

وَ إِذا فَعَلُوا فاحِشَةً قالُوا وَجَدْنا عَلَيْها آباءَنا وَ اللَّهُ أَمَرَنا بِها قُلْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشاءِ أَ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ ما لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(7:28) ***When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and Allah has enjoined it upon us." Say, "Indeed Allah does not enjoin indecencies. Do you attribute to Allah what you do not know?"***

Whereas in the previous verses God addressed all children of Adam, in this verse He addresses the Prophet in particular, since He wants to then deduce certain points that specifically apply to the Prophet's nation. We had a similar transition to this in verse 7:26, where the verse began with *O Children of Adam*, but ended with: *That is* (dhālika) *[one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition* (7:26). That transition served the same purpose.[1]

What happened in the story of Adam's garden was that their shameful parts were disclosed, which led to their expulsion from the garden. This shows that God is not pleased with indecent acts by the people. Following the same theme, this verse talks about the polytheists committing indecencies, justifying it by the practice of their fathers, and claiming that God has ordered them to do so. God commands His Messenger to respond to them by clarifying that He never orders indecency, and reminding them that their claim is not based on knowledge, but is a false imputation to God. The story of the garden is a proof for this.

The verse quotes two arguments from the polytheists to support and justify their practice: (1) that their fathers did the same; (2) that God has enjoined them to do so. Only the second argument is relevant to the above generalization from the story of Adam's garden. That is why the verse only responds to that. Their first statement is also flawed and not admitted by God, but it is not addressed here since it goes beyond the theme of these verses. God has refuted it in many other verses in the Qur'an, such as: *What, even if their fathers neither applied any reason nor were guided?!* (2:170).

Several exegetes have said that this verse—*When they commit an indecency…* (7:28)—refers to a common custom in the pre-Islamic era among the Arabs, where they used to circumambulate the Holy House

1 The demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* (as used at the end of verse 7:26) is used in second person singular addresses. The author's point is that these verses begin with general addresses to all humans, but then narrow down to make specific statements about the audience of the Qur'an at the time of revelation. (Trans.)

naked. Their reason for this was: "We do not want to circumambulate in clothes in which we have sinned, but we want to circumambulate just as our mothers gave birth to us." It is narrated from al-Farrāʾ that they used to take some pieces of leather called *ḥawf*, or pieces of wool called *raḥṭ*, and wrap it around their waist. Women used to cover their fronts with a strap or something else. Then they would chant:

الْيَوْمَ يَبْدُو بَعْضُهُ أَوْ كُلُّهُ وَ مَا بَدَا مِنْهُ فَلَا أُحِلُّهُ

Today shall appear part of it or all,
But to look at what appears is by no means halal.

This custom was common among them until the Prophet prohibited them from doing so after the conquest of Mecca, when he sent ʿAlī to recite the opening verses of Sūrah al-Barāʾah [9:1-16] in Mecca. The Prophet—and/or some Muslims—sometimes blamed the polytheists for this practice, but they justified it by saying: *We found our fathers practicing it, and Allah has enjoined it upon us*. Thus God refuted their claim and rebuked them by revealing: *Indeed Allah does not enjoin indecencies. Do you attribute to Allah what you do not know?*

The above interpretation of the verse is in fact quite possible, and there are some indications in the verse to support it. One indication is that their act is called *al-faḥshāʾ* (indecency), which means "a very abhorrent act." Another indication is that they used to justify it by saying that God has ordered them to do so. This means that the act must have been an indecency that was committed in the context of some worship, which matches naked circumambulation. Nevertheless, the verse uses the word *al-faḥshāʾ* in an unrestricted form [indicated by the article *al-*]. Therefore, it can have multiple instances and applications, including what they used to do, as well as other similar practices that are found among the people, especially in our time and age.

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ وَ أَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَ ادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ كَما بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(7:29) ***Say, "My Lord has enjoined justice* (bil-qisṭ),*" and [He has enjoined,] "Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship, and***

***invoke Him, putting your exclusive faith in Him. Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return.*"**

The last verse denied the claim that God has enjoined indecencies, and stated that such a claim is not rooted in anything that God has revealed. Hence it is a calumny against Him and a statement made without knowledge. This verse complements that negation by affirming what God has in fact enjoined: *Say, "My Lord has enjoined justice"*.... The last verse was about *faḥshāʾ* (indecency), which means a severely vile act, which would necessarily be on either extremum of excess or defect. That is why this verse contrasts it by *qisṭ* (justice, balance). Al-Rāghib says:

> *Qisṭ* means "a fair share," which makes it synonymous with *niṣf* and *niṣfah* (half, equal share). God says: *that He may reward those who have faith and do righteous deeds with justice* (bil-qisṭ) (10:4); *Maintain the weights with justice* (bil-qisṭ) (55:9). *Qasṭ* means usurping the fair share (*qisṭ*) of someone else, which is the same as *jawr* (oppression, injustice, wrong). *Iqsāṭ* means giving the fair share (*qisṭ*) of someone else, which is the same as *inṣāf* (fairness, equity). When one takes something wrongly, it is said: *qasaṭa al-rajul* (he wronged); and when one observes justice, it is said: *aqsaṭa* (he was fair). Thus the Qur'an says: *As for the unjust* (al-qāsiṭūn)*, they will be firewood for hell* (72:15); *and do justice* (aqsiṭū)*; indeed Allah loves the just* (al-muqsiṭīn) (49:9).

The meaning is, "Say: My Lord has commanded that you must observe fairness, follow the middle path in all affairs, and abstain from the two extremes of excess and lack. So be just and return [to your Lord]. Establish yourselves in every place of worship of God, and call Him with a sincere religion. Do not associate anyone with Him in your worship, whether that is an idols or your fathers—through blindly following them. This is justice (*qisṭ*) in worship."

... and [He has enjoined,] "Set your faces* (wujūhakum, plural of wajh) *[toward Him] at every place of worship...": The conjunction "and" apparently shows that the first part of the verse implies an imperative: "Be just and set you heart..." The *wajh* (face) of something is the part of it that faces other things. The human face often represents the person as a whole. Setting up the "face" at every place of worship means doing justice to this act [of worship] completely, without any shortcoming. Therefore, the meaning of setting up one's face in worship boils down to engaging in

worship only and cutting oneself from every other occupation.

… Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship, and invoke Him, putting your exclusive faith in Him…: Based on our explanation, these two sentences together mean that one should free oneself from every occupation other than God's service, and from any object of worship other than God. Among these "others"—from which one should sever oneself—is worship itself. Worship is the act of *paying* attention [to God] not an *object* of attention itself. If one's attention is directed at one's worship, then that act is no longer "worship," because worship means turning one's attention to God. Hence, when anyone worships, one must forget everything else, and must be mindful of no one but God.

Here is a list of how other exegetes have interpreted *Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship* (masjid):

(1) It means: "When you pray in any mosque, directly face the *qiblah* (direction of prayer)."

(2) *Masjid* means "time of prostration" which is the time of prayer. The meaning is: "At times of prayers face the direction that God has ordered you, which is the Kaʿbah."

(3) "At every *masjid*" means that if it is the time of prayer and you are in [the vicinity of] a mosque, then pray in that mosque. Do not postpone it until you go back to your own mosque [in your neighborhood].

(4) It means: "Go to the mosque whenever there is the time to pray." In other words, the verse commands praying in congregation.

(5) It means: "Direct your faces at God by obeying Him alone. Do not associate with Him the idols or any other partner."

Despite their difference, none of these views is a plausible interpretation of the verse. The first three do not match the condition of Muslims in Mecca, which is where this chapter was revealed. At the time the Kaʿbah was not the *qiblah*, nor did the Muslims have multiple mosques to pray in. The last view is close to our interpretation of the verse, but its problem is that it is rather an exposition of the next part of the verse about *ikhlāṣ* (exclusivity, sincerity, purity)—*putting your exclusive faith in Him*—not the part which says: *Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship*.

فَرِيقاً هَدى وَ فَرِيقاً حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الضَّلالَةُ إِنَّهُمُ اتَّخَذُوا الشَّياطِينَ أَوْلِياءَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(7:30) ***A part* (farīqan) *[of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part* (farīqan)*, for they took devils for guardians instead of Allah, and supposed they were guided.***

The linguistic construct of the word *farīqan* suggests that it functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition of the subject "you" at the end of the last verse: *Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return*. In other words, the end of the last verse compares people's end to their origin, and this verse clarifies in what sense the two stages are similar. It means: "You shall return while you are two parties, just as you initiated while being two parties."[1] A similar analogy [between the beginning and the end] is found in the verse: *Certainly you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time* (6:94), which means: "Certainly you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time *alone*."[2] This is the clearest meaning that we can infer from the verse.

Some exegetes have claimed that *farīqan* cannot be a *ḥāl* for what is mentioned in the previous verse. Therefore, there must be another point of similarity between the two stages of their origination and end, such as being alone in both stages, issuing from dust in both stages, both stages being by God's power, and so on. However, all these are far-fetched possibilities from the meaning of the verse. After all, why should God not state the point of similarity, and instead mention something that is not needed, especially in a context where the intended meaning could be misunderstood? We shall explain this below, by God's will.

What is meant by "beginning"—in *Even as He brought you forth in the beginning*—is only the very onset of human life in this world, not the entire span of human life in this world in contrast to their life in the hereafter. The meaning is: "He created you in this world, where He guided a party of you, while another party were destined for deviation. Thus you shall return [while being composed of these two groups]." This is effectively the same as an interpretation offered by some exegetes: "You will be resurrected in the same state that you died: those who died with *īmān*

1 *Ḥāl* always implies the meaning of "while." It describes a subject who does an act *while* being in a certain state (*ḥāl*), or an object which is acted upon *while* it is in a certain state. (Trans.)

2 In other words, verse 6:94 clearly states how the two stages are similar: in that you are alone and on your own. (Trans.)

(belief, faith) shall be resurrected with *īmān*, and those who died with *kufr* (disbelief, infidelity) shall be resurrected with *kufr*."

When we speak of the "beginning" of something that stretches over time, what is meant is the first part of it where it starts, not all of it.[1] Here, the audience are all people. Hence, their "beginning" would be when humankind was first created and appeared. Moreover, this verse builds on the previous verses about the origination of humankind, where God says: *Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"* (7:11). Therefore, *as He brought you forth in the beginning* refers to *how* the previously mentioned creation of humankind unfolded. The idea of having two groups from the beginning was already alluded to in God's address to Satan: *Begone hence, blameful, banished! Whoever of them follows you, I will surely fill hell with you all* (7:18). This verse shows a divine decree that humankind shall divide into two groups: one group are those who are guided on the straight path, and one group are those upon whom error is fixed. This is how He originated humans, and that is how they shall return.

A more explicit mention of this is found in another verse, where God says [to Satan]: *This is a straight path incumbent upon Me. Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you* (15:41-42). The "straight path" mentioned here refers to a definite decree from God that people shall divide into two groups. One group are outside Satan's authority, and those are the ones whom God guides. Another group are the perverse who follow Satan, for whom it is prescribed to deviate from the truth due to submitting to Satan and following him. The Qur'an says: *About him [Satan] it has been decreed that should anyone take him for a friend, he will lead him astray, and conduct him toward the punishment of the Blaze* (22:4). This verse suggests that their misguidance is a consequence of their following the devil and taking him as a friend, not vice versa.

Another example is: *Said He, "The truth is that—and I speak the truth—I will surely fill hell with you and all those who follow you"* (38:84-85). Here again we see that God has decreed that humans shall divide into two groups. It is for the same reason that after the story of the fall, God says:

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1 This is the second time the author is stating this point. This sensitivity and emphasis is to avoid the impression of *jabr* (compulsion, determinism, predestination). (Trans.)

Get down both of you from it… Then, should (fa-immā) *any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance will not go astray, nor will they be miserable. But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind* (20:123-124). Here, the letter *fā'* (then, so, therefore) shows that the division of humankind into two groups was a direct consequence of their appearance on earth. It should also be noted that "blindness" here means "error" [that is, being blind of guidance].

Given the above Qur'anic evidence, we can interpret the current verses of discussion—*as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return…* (7:29-30)—as a justification for the previous commands [at the beginning of verse 7:29]. The meaning would be: "Observe justice in your actions and dedicate yourselves to God exclusively, because when God created you humankind, He decreed that you shall split into two groups: a group that is guided by Him, and a group that deviates from the path. You will return as He originated you, one group having been guided by, Him and another group being overcome by error because of accepting the authority of devils. Therefore, you should be just and sincere so that you may be among those who are guided through God's instruction, not those who go astray through adopting the authority of devils."

Our suggested interpretation here makes the verse comparable to the verse: *Everyone has a direction to which he turns; so take the lead in the good works. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you all together* (2:148). This verse, on the one hand, states that everyone has a specific goal that they seek, until they reach its definite goal of either felicity or wretchedness. On the other hand, it orders the people to *take the lead in the good works*. If the felicity or wretchedness of every person is already certain, then this order would not make sense. Therefore, what is meant is: "Every one of you should necessarily turn toward a specific direction—which will either lead you to paradise or to hell. Hence, hasten to do good deeds so that you may be among those who are directed toward felicity, not among the other group."

We can interpret the current verses of discussion [7:29-30] in like manner: "You shall return in two groups just as God brought you into being in two groups according to His definite decree. Therefore, you must be just in your actions and sincerely dedicated to God, so that you may be among those who are guided on the return journey, not among those

for whom error is established."

Finally, it is possible to say that the last part of verse 7:29 and the entire verse 7:30—*Even as He brought you forth in the beginning…*—compose an independent statement that is not primarily a continuation of the first part of verse 7:29. But even in that case, this statement would still bear a subtle hint to the previous command to justice and sincerity, as it springs to mind based on the context.[1]

… for they took devils for guardians…: This statement explains why error was ordained and established for them: *while error is fixed upon a part*. It is as if the decree of being destined for error and loss is conditional on the person accepting the guardianship of Satan. This is confirmed by

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1 The author has bundled the last sentence in verse 7:29—*Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return*—with verse 7:30 as one unit. His reason for doing so is that the sentence in verse 7:29 compares the "beginning" to the "return" without specifying in what sense they are similar, which necessitates the discussion to continue in the next verse. However, the sentence in verse 7:29 seems to have a complete meaning on its own. It is not about the *how* of the beginning and the return, but about their actual *occurrence*. An almost identical sentence is mentioned elsewhere, using the same verbs, about the creation as a whole, not the creation of humankind in particular: *as We began the first creation, so We shall return it* (21:104). This verse shows that the comparison between the beginning and the return is complete in itself, because it is about the very existence and creation of things, not about some *aspect* of their existence and creation. The following two verses also convey the same message: *Say, "He will revive them who produced them the first time"* (36:79); *Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul* (31:28). What is stated in verse 7:29—*Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return*—can be compared with narrations which say, "As you wake up [from sleep], you will be raised [from death]." There are many verses in the Qur'an which prove the *truth* and *occurrence* of the Resurrection based on the truth and occurrence of the initial creation. Hence, assuming that the letter *kāf* ("as" in *as He brought you forth in the beginning*) denotes a comparison in the *quality* and *manner* of beginning and return is an unwarranted assumption, which makes much of the author's above discussions contrived and only secondarily related to the verses. Similarly, verse 7:30—*A part [of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part*—is a complete sentence on its own, as the same idea is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an without reference to the beginning and the return: *Then among them were some whom Allah guided, and among them were some who deserved to be in error* (16:36). This means that the word *farīqan* is not a *ḥāl*, but is the object of the verb *hadá* (He has guided). (Trans.)

the verse: *About him [Satan] it has been decreed that should anyone take him for a friend, he will lead him astray* (22:4). Because of accepting the guardianship of devils in this world, error befell and overcame them in a way that does not depart from them anymore. This idea can also be deduced from the verse: *We have assigned them companions who make to seem decorous to them whatever is before them and whatever is behind them, and the word became due against them, as it did against the nations that passed away before them of jinn and humans. They were indeed losers* (41:25).

… and supposed they were guided: This is an interpretive addition to the previous sentence. It clarifies why error became fixed and binding to them. For those who deviate from the straight path and fall for falsehood, one can be optimistic of their return to the truth as long as they acknowledge their error, know that they are lost, and have not forgotten the right way. It can be hoped that they will soon abandon their wrong ways and return to the path of guidance. However, if they believe that their falsehood is the truth and consider themselves as pursuing guidance while they are in error, then that solidifies them in their error and deviation, and there is no hope for their salvation anymore.

In other words, this final statement—*and supposed they were guided*—means that error became their due as a necessary consequence of this supposition. Elsewhere we read: *Say, "Shall we inform you about the biggest losers in regard to works? Those whose endeavor goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good"* (18:104); *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and their hearing, and there is a blindfold on their sight, and there is a great punishment for them* (2:6-7).

Humans have such a makeup—called the *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition)—that does not allow them to submit to anything other than the truth, or seek anything other than their good and happiness. The problem is in the *application* of this disposition. If one is supported by divine grace, they will pursue the right path, seek the actual truth, and achieve it at the end. They end up serving God alone, in which lies the eternal happiness and good life that they wish. Sometimes, however, one deviates from the straight path and chooses falsehood instead of truth, evil instead of good, and wretchedness instead of felicity. They adopt their

desires as their god, serve the Devil, submit to the idols, indulge in the material adornments and glamour of this world, and take the world as their final goal [instead of a means and passage]. Nevertheless, they do so only because of supposing that this is what they should do; that this is the right way and the correct thing to do. In other words, they choose falsehood supposing that it is the truth; they do evil assuming that it is good; and they pursue wretchedness thinking that it leads to happiness. This means that the innate human cognition [which is always oriented toward true beliefs and good deeds] is preserved without any change, but the person has mismatched it in its practical applications. God says: *O you who were given the Book! Believe in what We have sent down confirming what is with you, before We blot out the faces and turn them backwards* (4:47).

It is impossible that one would choose and follow falsehood, wretchedness and loss through falsehood, wretchedness and loss. The Qur'an says: *the origination of Allah according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering Allah's creation* (30:30). Any being that works in the universe—including humankind—only inclines toward a goal or act which is in harmony with its essence and beneficial for it. If we see any counter examples for this, it is only a prima facie observation, not the fact of the matter.

The above is what we can say about these verses after a complete analysis and deep reflection: *as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return. A part [of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part…* (7:29-30). Our interpretation is based on the word *farīqan* [in verse 7:30] functioning as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for the verb *so will you return*. That is, the beginning and the return are compared with one another in the sense that in both cases the people will be classified into two groups. This meaning is applicable whether the last part of verse 7:29 [*as He brought you forth…*] is connected to the previous part of the verse—as a justification for it—or not.

However, most exegetes have agreed that the two parties mentioned in verse 7:30 only describe the state of return of the people, not their state of beginning. They have assumed there to be another basis for comparing the beginning with the return [in verse 7:29]—which is not mentioned here [in verse 7:30]. One exegete has interpreted "beginning" as "the entire round of worldly life." As we said above, this cannot be true, and we shall discuss it further below. Since these verses are surrounded by commands

and prohibitions, they imply the free will of humankind. That is why the exegetes have opted for the above interpretations—because they did not want to fall for *jabr* (compulsion, determinism, predestination). However, our readers would concur that our interpretation does not necessitate *jabr* given our thorough analysis.

There is a difference of opinion among the exegetes concerning how the last part of verse 7:29 connects to the previous part. Here is a list of their suggested views:

(1) The last sentence warns the people about the Resurrection in order to solidify and emphasize the commands in the previous part of the verse, and draws on the beginning of creation as evidence. The meaning is: "Call God exclusively, for indeed you shall be resurrected and recompensed for your deeds. If this seems unlikely to your minds, then remember your initial creation. As God originated you the first time, He will certainly resurrect you a second time."

Comment: This interpretation revolves around God's power as a basis of comparison between the beginning and the end, which is mentioned to warn the people of retribution in the hereafter. If this were the intended meaning, then instead of mentioning the "people" as those who will return, the verse should have mentioned God as the One Who returns the people.[1] Furthermore, if that were the central meaning of the verse, it should have explicitly mentioned retribution—as the above exegete has offered in his interpretation of the verse.

(2) The last sentence is an argument against those who deny the Resurrection. It connects to what we read a few verses above: *In it [the earth] you will live, and in it you will die; and from it you will be raised [from the dead]* (7:25). The meaning is: "Your return is no more difficult than your beginning."

Comment: This interpretation suffers from the same problem as the last. In addition, it restricts the meaning without any supporting evidence.

(3) The last sentence is an independent statement that is unconnected to the previous part of the verse.

Comment: We already discussed this possibility above.

(4) It is connected to the first part of the verse. The meaning altogether

1 In other words, instead of saying *so will you return*, it should have said, "so will God return you" because the focus is God's power to bring the dead back to life. (Trans.)

is: "Dedicate yourselves to God exclusively in this life, because you shall be resurrected as you die—the believers in a state of *īmān* (belief, faith) and the disbelievers in a state of *kufr* (disbelief, infidelity)."

Comment: This interpretation assumes the "beginning" to include the entire lifespan of this world, in contrast to our eternal existence in the hereafter. It also assumes the comparison between "return" and "beginning" to be between one's eternal life and one's ending of life in this world. However, as we said above, there is no supporting evidence in the verse for this interpretation.

يا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَ كُلُوا وَ اشْرَبُوا وَ لا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(7:31) ***O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every place of worship*** **(masjid)*****, and eat and drink, but do not waste*** **(lā tusrifū, from saraf)*****; indeed He does not like the wasteful.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> "*Saraf* means overstepping the limits in anything that one does, although it is used more often in financial spending."

"Putting on adornment on every place of worship" means dressing up beautifully when one wants to attend the *masjid* (place or time of worship), which can be identified with prayer, circumambulation, and other forms of God's remembrance. Therefore, adorning oneself on "every place of worship" boils down to adorning oneself for the prayer (*ṣalāh*) and other similar acts. Given the unconditional sense of *masjid*, it would include the Eid prayers, daily congregational prayers, and other forms of worship and remembrance.

… and eat and drink, but do not waste…: The two commands here imply permissibility (*ibāḥah*), while the prohibition implies impermissibility (*ḥurmah*).[1] These instructions are then justified by adding: *indeed He*

1 In other words, "eat" and "drink" are neither obligatory (*wājib*) nor recommended (*mustaḥabb*), by they are mentioned to show the wide range of permissible acts before adding the restriction on being wasteful. Similarly, the first part of the verse does not *primarily* mean that adornment in prayer is recommended, but it simply means that it is permissible. This is clearly confirmed by the next verse. These verses by no means promote luxury, extravagance and consumerism. They should be viewed in the light of the

does not like the wasteful. This verse relates to the story of Adam's garden, as we mentioned before. We also said that the universal address of this verse includes all humankind. Therefore, the message of this verse is not limited to any specific religion or any subgroup of people. One exegete has said:

> This verse—*O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every place of worship*—shows that the Prophet's mission includes all humankind. The verse's address does not include women from a linguistic point of view,[1] but they are also included alongside men based on evidence from the shariah.

We should clarify that even though the rules mentioned here apply to all humans, it does not specify whether these rules were transmitted through a single mission or multiple missions. Moreover, the inclusion of women in the verse is actually linguistic, because there is rational evidence to generalize the male address to females (called *taghlīb*).[2]

قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبادِهِ وَ الطَّيِّباتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَياةِ الدُّنْيا خالِصَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيامَةِ كَذلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآياتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(7:32) ***Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment* (zīnah) *of Allah which He has brought* (akhraja, from ikhrāj) *forth for His servants, and the good things* (al-ṭayyibāt) *of [His] provision?" Say, "These are, on the Day of Resurrection, exclusively for the faithful in the life of this world." Thus do We elaborate the communications for a people who have knowledge.***

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pre-Islamic custom of circumambulating the Kaʿbah naked, as discussed by the author under verse 7:28. This also relates to the falling of Adam and Eve's coverings (7:22, 7:27), and God's sending of *garments to cover your shameful parts, and adornments* (7:26). Therefore, the primary meaning is: "Put on some clothes," where clothes are referred to as "adornments" as one of their aspects, mentioned specifically here in order to appeal to the audience. (Trans.)

1 The verse says *banī Ādam*, which literally means "sons of Adam." The subsequent pronouns in the verse are also masculine. Thus the discussion about the inclusion or exclusion of women. (Trans.)

2 Taghlīb is defined both above and below. See my first note under the section entitled "The People on the *Aʿrāf*" below. (Trans.)

This is a rhetorical question that implies a negation. The verse involves a transition from the general address of the last verse to a specific point about the Muslim nation. We had similar transitions to this above, where we had a general address to all humankind in verse 7:26 (*That is [one] of Allah's signs, so that they may take admonition*) followed by a specific address to the polytheists in verse 7:28 (*When they commit an indecency…*).

Zayn is the opposite of *shayn*, which means "anything that brings blame and disgrace to the person." Therefore, *zīnah* means "anything that removes blame and disgrace from the person, and makes others not adverse to the person." In this verse, *ikhrāj* (bringing forth) implies *iẓhār* (revealing, showing, making appear). God has inspired and guided humankind—through their *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, initial makeup)—to invent various forms of adornments that are generally appealing to them, are attractive to their souls, and take aversion and disgust away from them. By so doing, it is as if God has "brought forth" adornments for them. These adornments were hidden and concealed [deep in their *fiṭrah*], then God made them visible to their senses. This is an imaginary metaphor.[1]

If one were to live alone in this world, without any social interaction, then the person would have no need for any adornment whatsoever. Even the idea of having adornments would not cross the person's mind, because it is always a feeling of need which prompts someone to do something. However, humans need to pass this life in societies, where they confront other people's attraction, aversion, like, dislike, pleasure and displeasure. They have no choice but to learn the acceptable and unacceptable ways of dressing and appearing in public. That is why the "Hidden Teacher" has taught them through their initial makeup and creation (*fiṭrah*) their various forms of *zīnah* (adornment, ornament), which means anything that removes blame and disgrace from them, and puts them in a good shape. Perhaps this is why the verse refers to humankind as "servants" (*ʿibād*).[2]

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1 An "imaginary metaphor" (*istiʿārah takhyīliyyah*) is when a comparison is made between one thing and an *implication* of another thing, such as "the claws of death." In this verse, what is meant is that God has created humankind in a way that one of its implications is that they produce and "bring forth" adornments for themselves. (Trans.)

2 This statement of the author can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "Servants" is plural, referring to the social aspect involved in adornments. (2) "His servants"

What we described as *zīnah* here is among the most important foundations of human societies. It is a deeply rooted custom that is directly related to how advanced a civilization and culture is. If it were to be lifted from a society, the society would collapse and disintegrate, because being devoid of *zīnah* in this sense means being devoid of good and bad, like and dislike, pleasure and displeasure. It is impossible to have a society without such values and classifications. The reader should reflect on this.

Ṭayyib means "that which is agreeable with one's nature." *The good things of [His] provision* are various kinds of food that people ingest. It could also be interpreted more broadly to include anything that serves the continuation of human life, such as food, drink, sex, shelter and so on. God has equipped humans with the ability to feel what they need, and various appetites that pull them toward fulfilling those needs through appealing pleasures that are harmonious with their being. This quality is called *ṭīb*, which means agreement and harmony with one's nature.

There is no need to elaborate the fundamental position of *the good things of [His] provision* in human life. Humans can continue living happily only by provisions that are agreeable with their faculties and systems—in the right proportion according to each faculty. Any faculty or organ that is placed in humankind is because of their need to it. If they transgress from what is compatible with their makeup to what is incompatible, they will be forced to amend their resulting deficiency in the faculty that has been neglected by drawing from the other faculties. For example, a gluttonous person who is given to excess eating will suffer digestive problems. Then he would have to resort to drugs which treat his stomach and digestive system. However, overuse of such drugs will make him addicted and resistant to them, such that they will no longer be effective for him. Thus he will become chronically ill, and that will hamper him from attending to the most necessary needs of his life, the most important of which is having sound reasoning and a free intellect. Other forms of excess have similar effects.

Stepping beyond the limits of "good provisions" would turn the human to another being that is not created for this world, nor is this world created for it. What good is there in trying to live in a way that is against our creation, pursuing a path that is different from the path of our primal

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implies a sense of divine mercy, referring to the efficacy of adornments in social human life. (Trans.)

nature, and seeking a goal that is not our perfection? That is the case when we exert our maximum effort to acquire as much as we can to sate any appetite or lust, only because it seems appealing to our imagination.

In this verse God says that He has "brought forth" an adornment for His servants, meaning that He has made it known to them through inspiring it to their *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, initial makeup). Meanwhile, we know that the *fiṭrah* is only disposed to real needs in one's life. This is the strongest evidence for the permissibility of anything: to have a genuine need for it according to one's nature and essence. In other words, God's creation and makeup of humankind (*takwīn*) can be indicative of legislative permissibility (*tashrīʿ*). A genuine need in one's existence shows that God has made a connection between that being and the means of fulfilling it. God has embedding certain faculties in humans which prompt them to seek what they need. This prompt is itself a message and evidence of permissibility.

The conjunction "and" in *and the good things of [His] provision* means that these good things are also among what God *has brought forth for His servants*. That is, there are various good provisions—meaning things that are agreeable with human nature and creation—which people discover through the faculties that God has embedded in their being. They learn about these through their feeling of a need to them in order to support and sustain their life. As we said above, the clearest evidence to the permissibility of an act is having a natural need and existential lack for it.

The question in this verse is a rhetorical one which implies a negation. This shows that the permissibility of God's adornment and good provisions is something that should not be doubted, because it is the rule of reason, we find it intuitively in ourselves (in our *fiṭrah*), and is also approved by religious law.

Nevertheless, this permissibility is only at the level of moderation between the two extremes of excess and defect. This is what our *fiṭrah* necessitates, and it also matches what we read above: *but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful* (7:31); *Say, "My Lord has enjoined justice"* (7:29). Transgressing the limits to either excess or deficiency threatens the survival of human society and hampers their achievement of a happy life. It is like destroying the foundations of a building. We can rarely find any war or natural disaster anywhere in the world—which has threatened the continuation of the human race and destroyed their cities—that is not

a result of some extravagance and excess in seeking either adornment or provision.[1] This is the nature of the beast: humans do not stop at any limit. If it comes to going out of balance and stepping outside the middle path, they continue deviating without recognizing any cap or ever returning to moderation. That is why it is most appropriate to keep them always in check with a whip of discipline, and constantly remind them of the most basic principles which can be verified by their reason [even in the lack of formal learning and education]. This is why God gives us orders with respect to the necessities of life such as food, drink, clothes, shelter and putting on adornments.

The author of *al-Manār* has an excellent point which is relevant to our discussion here:

> Commanding the people to put on their adornment may seem rather obvious and redundant. However, to appreciate its value, one should only study the history of various tribes and nations. There have been numerous primitive societies and idolatrous people leading a savage life in the woods, mountains, deserts, caves and islands, especially in Africa. Men and women in these societies were completely bare of all clothing. When Islam reached them, it taught them to put on garments by making it religiously incumbent.
>
> When some Christian preachers in Europe attacked and criticized Islam in order to prevent the conversion of European Christians, some more fair-minded thinkers among them responded by referring to the spread of Islam in Africa, from where it entered Europe. Islam promoted the spread of civilization among its followers by opposing nudity and imposing a dress code. This in turn led to the flourishing of the textile industry in Europe.
>
> I should add that some idolatrous societies which were more advanced in civilization, science and technology, were still leading bare lives until they faced Islam. Then they started wearing clothes and adorning themselves with garments. They turned to manufacturing clothes, and set an example which was adopted to some extent by their neighboring societies.
>
> A good example for this is India. Despite having a long-lasting

1 Here, adornment (*zīnah*) and provision (*rizq*) can be matched, respectively, with "luxury goods" and "normal goods" as defined in economics. (Trans.)

polytheistic civilization, they have always had millions of men and women who were either completely naked, or with a quarter or half of their bodies clad. And this continues up to this day [among the Hindus]. One can see some of their men in their workplaces and markets with barely any clothes. Some wear a piece that only covers their two private parts, which they call "the two ducts" (*sabīlayn*). This is an Arabic word used by Islamic jurists when discussing things that makes one's ablution void.[1] Some of them only cover the lower half of their body. There are some women with their bellies and legs revealed, or their upper half completely or partially bare. Some of their fair-minded scholars have admitted that it was the Muslims who taught them to put on clothes and eat on dishes. The poor among them [who cannot afford to have a dish] place their food on leaves and eat from that, yet they are better than many other idolaters in terms of covering and adornment, because they were ruled by Muslim rulers. Indian Muslims have been, and continue to be, among the most advanced Muslims on earth in terms of knowledge and practice, and in terms of their contribution to the idolaters in their country.

In contrast to Indian Muslims, Muslims in the Far East have been farther from religious knowledge and closer to idolatry in terms of clothing and many other religious practices. For instance, Siamese women only consider their two private parts as shameful parts that must be covered, as we pointed out before. In short, the more deeply Islam is established anywhere, th closer its people come to a level of clothing that matches human worth and development.

Here is where one would realize and appreciate the value of this reforming injunction in Islam. If this most civilized religion did not include the prescription that God's servants must put on their adornment, all these nations and tribes would not transform from leading a savage life to having an advanced civilization. Only those who are ignorant of history would fail to recognize this advantage of Islam, even though they may be historians otherwise. It is not unlikely to find among the pretentious westernized intellectuals

1 One loses one's state of ritual purity by things that exit the "two ducts." (Trans.)

> certain people who lounge in pubs, taverns and nightclubs, tilting their fez on their head and pontificating: "Why should wearing clothes for beauty be discussed in religion? This is among the necessary requirements of human life, and people do not need divine law or revelation to teach them about it." They voice the same opinion concerning verses like: *and eat and drink* (7:31).

It is narrated that [Hārūn] al-Rashīd had a professional Christian physician. One day he told ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Wāqid, "There is no teaching of medicine in your scripture, while knowledge has two branches: religious knowledge and physical knowledge." ʿAlī responded to his criticism:

God has summarized all medicine in half a verse, where He says: *eat and drink, but do not waste* (7:31). Likewise, our Prophet encapsulated all medicine when he said: "The stomach is the house of malady, and abstinence is the root of all remedy. Give to each body what you have made it accustomed to."

The physician commented, "Your scripture and your prophet have not left any aspect of medicine for Galen!"

… Say, "These are, on the Day of Resurrection, exclusively for the faithful in the life of this world": The first part of this verse—*Say, "Who has forbidden…"*—is certainly addressed to the unbelievers [because of its critical tone]. Or perhaps it is addressed to both the believers and the unbelievers, in conformity with the last verse, which was addressed to all humankind: *O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every place of worship, and eat and drink, but do not waste* (7:31). This means that God has brought forth adornment and good provision for all people, whether believer or unbeliever.[1]

Then, the subsequent part of the verse— *Say, "These are for the faithful…"*—is meant to describe an advantage for the believers [in contrast to the general enjoyments available to everyone]. While the believers share God's blessings with others in this life, they will be the exclusive beneficiaries of these enjoyments in the hereafter. This means that *in the life of this world* is a *ẓarf* (container, receptacle, place of occurrence) for the faith of *the faithful*, and *on the Day of Resurrection* is a *ẓarf* for *These are*. "Exclusively" (*khāliṣah*) functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier,

1 In other words, consistency of flow necessitates that the first part of the current verse establishes the permissibility of adornment and good provision for all people, not just believers. (Trans.)

participial phrase) for the feminine pronoun *hiya* (These are). This implies that there is an omitted word like *kāʾinah* in the verse.[1] In the Arabic text of the verse, the word *khāliṣah* is mentioned before *the Day of Resurrection* in order to add some distance between *the life of this world* and *the Day of Resurrection*. The meaning is: "These [adornments and provisions] are for the faithful on the Day of Resurrection; it will exclusively belong to them, and no one else will enjoy them there, unlike the life of this world. Whoever is faithful in this world will possess these blessings on the Day of Resurrection."[2]

Here are two alternative interpretations of *khāliṣah* (exclusively, purely) suggested by some exegetes:

(1) What is meant is freedom from pain and anxiety. The meaning is: "These blessings are for the believers in this world, but they are mixed with pain and sorrow. However, on the Day of Resurrection the believers will have a pure enjoyment of these blessings."

Comment: The problem with this interpretation is that there is no indication in this verse or the previous verses referring to the pleasures of this world being surrounded by pain and limitation. Therefore, there is no evidence to support the above interpretation of *khāliṣah*.

(2) *In the life of this world* is a *ẓarf* (container, receptacle, place of occurrence) for the blessings which belong to *the faithful*. The meaning is: "It is the believers who primarily and essentially deserve these blessings in this world, but others also share in these blessings in their shadow, without deserving the blessings as the believers do. On the Day of Resurrection, however, these blessings will be exclusively for the believers." It should be noted that among the [seven] main recitations of the Qur'an, Nāfiʿ's recitation reads *khāliṣatun* as a predicate, meaning that "these blessings shall be exclusive for the believer." Other recitations say *khāliṣatan* as a *ḥāl*

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1 This part entirely pertains to the Arabic construct of the verse. The word *kāʾinah* is already included in the English translation, where it says: *These are…* (Trans.)

2 To elaborate this further, the meaning is: "Those who are faithful in the life of this world, shall exclusively enjoy God's blessings on the Day of Resurrection." This means that "the life of this world" is the time or place of their faith, and "the Day of Resurrection" is the time or place of their enjoyment. They are separated by the insertion of the word *khāliṣah* (exclusively) between them because it would be awkward and confusing to say, "in the life of this world on the Day of Resurrection." (Trans.)

(circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), meaning that "these blessings shall be for the believers *while* they [the blessings] are exclusive for them."

According to this view, the believers are the primary beneficiaries of worldly pleasures in the sense that they are the ones who benefit from divine teachings and commands that are conducive to a good life in this world, such as the command to put on their adornment, consume the good provision of their Lord, fulfill their obligatory tasks in life, and reflect on God's signs in the horizons and in themselves. All these instructions lead to the development of industries and technologies which advance human civilization and culture. The believers are taught these ways through revelation and prophethood. They must learn about these blessings and be grateful for them.

Comment: This interpretation cannot be the direct meaning of the verse because there is no indication in the verse about primary and secondary beneficiaries of these blessings. Perhaps what is meant is that the verse starts by assigning worldly blessings to the believers, then it clarifies that the unbelievers share in these blessings with the believers, but they are only secondary beneficiaries who sponge off the believers. However, even this meaning is not supported by the verse, because the verse only talks about the equal partaking of both groups in worldly blessings. It does not establish any exclusivity for the believers in this world, so there are no grounds to talk about primary and secondary enjoyment. Not only that, but perhaps the matter is the other way around, as evidenced by other verses like: *Were it not [for the danger] that mankind would be one community, We would have surely made for those who defy the All-Merciful, silver roofs for their houses and [silver] stairways by which they ascend… yet all that would be nothing but the wares of the life of this world, and the hereafter near your Lord is for the Godwary* (43:33-35). These verses suggest that if there were to be any exclusivity for worldly enjoyments, the disbelievers would be the main beneficiaries.[1]

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1 The English translation of the verse (7:32) was adjusted to reflect the author's interpretation. An alternative translation (by Qarā'ī) is: "These are for the faithful in the life of this world, and exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection." This is a more apparent meaning given the context of the verse and other Qur'anic usages. It is also supported by the fourth narration quoted below. The author has favored the other meaning in order to be consistent with the general address of *O Children of Adam* (7:31). However, the same verse talks about every *masjid* (place or time of prayer), which can be a clear

… Thus do We elaborate the communications for a people who have knowledge: This sentence implies that God has a special favor upon the people of knowledge through elaborating His communications for them.

قُلْ إِنَّما حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ الْفَواحِشَ ما ظَهَرَ مِنْها وَ ما بَطَنَ وَ الْإِثْمَ وَ الْبَغْيَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ
وَ أَنْ تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ ما لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِ سُلْطاناً وَ أَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ ما لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(7:33) ***Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies*** **(al-fawāḥish)**, ***the outward among them and the inward ones, and sin*** **(al-ithm)** ***and undue aggression*** **(al-baghy)**, ***and that you should ascribe to Allah partners for which He has not sent down any authority, and that you should attribute to Allah what you do not know."***

We already discussed the vocabulary used in this verse in detail. As we explained before, *fawāḥish* are "sins at the utmost degree of vileness and reprehensibility," such as adultery and sodomy. *Ithm* is "an act that results in loss, failure, abasement and humiliation for the person in this life," such as drinking wine, which destroys one's reputation, wealth, health and good name. *Baghy* means "seeking something that one is not entitled to." It includes all sorts of unlawful consumption, oppression and extortion against fellow human beings. The adjective "undue" does not qualify and restrict its meaning, but only describes and expresses an inseparable quality of *baghy*. The same can be said about the addition of *for which He has not sent down any authority* [to "partners" for God].[1]

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indication of what is meant by exclusivity in the following verse. Moreover, whenever the Qur'an talks about "the faithful in this world," this world is never a *ẓarf* (container, receptacle, place of occurrence) of *faith*—implying "those who lead faithful lives in this world"—but it is always a *ẓarf* of some *advantage* for the faithful—implying "those who lead faithful lives shall have such-and-such in this world." It is already understood that faith and good deeds take place in this world; therefore the qualification *in this world* indicates a worldly advantage for the faithful in addition to their reward in the hereafter. This can be clearly seen in these verses: *Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses rise up* (40:51); *For those who do good, in this world there will be a good [life], and the abode of the Hereafter is certainly better* (16:30). A similar pattern can be observed in verse 39:10, especially when we compare it with verse 16:41, which conveys the same message with a different wording. (Trans.)

1 In other words, *all* aggression (*bagh*) is undue, and *all* assumed partners of

The last verse was about the lawfulness of adornment and good provisions. This would naturally raise an interest in the audience to also know about things that God has forbidden. That is why God continues to complete the picture in this verse by listing unlawful things. This verse encompasses all things that are religiously unlawful, which can primarily be divided into two categories: (1) wrong action; and (2) wrong speech or belief. The first three items mentioned in the verse are actions, which can be divided into two subcategories: (1) wrong acts against other people, which is called *undue aggression*; and (2) wrong acts at the personal level, irrespective of others, which are either flagrant or not. The flagrant is called *indecencies*; otherwise it is called *sin*. The last two items in the verse—ascribing partners to God and making false ascriptions to Him—pertain to one's speech or belief.

وَ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ فَإِذا جاءَ أَجَلُهُمْ لا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ ساعَةً وَ لا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(7:34) ***There is a [preordained] time for every nation: when their time comes, they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it.***

This verse, much like the many other verses before it, is subsequent to what God said at the end of Adam's story: *He said, "In it you will live, and in it you will die; and from it you will be raised [from the dead]"* (7:25). The verse means that societies and communities have fixed terms and life spans, much like individuals.

Based on the connection between this verse and the verses at the end of Adam's story, we can arguably deduce that verse 7:25—*He said, "In it you will live…"*—is about the life of individual persons and individual societies, each of which is only one constituent of the human species; while verse 7:24—*On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for some time*—refers to the entire human race. Humanity as a whole has a lifespan for *some time* (7:24), which refers either to the time of their extinction or the Resurrection.

يا بَنِي آدَمَ إِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِنْكُمْ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آياتِي فَمَنِ اتَّقى وَ أَصْلَحَ فَلا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ لا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا وَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْها أُولئِكَ أَصْحابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيها خالِدُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

God are without any justification from God. (Trans.)

(7:35-36) ***O Children of Adam! If*** **(immā)** ***there come to you messengers from among yourselves, recounting*** **(yaquṣṣūna)** ***to you My communications, then those who are Godwary and righteous will have no fear, nor will they grieve. But those who deny Our communications and are disdainful of them, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it [forever].***

The word *immā* is in fact the conditional particle *inn* (stressed) added to the particle *mā*.[1] Their composition implies that the condition shall certainly occur. The root meaning of the verb *yaquṣṣūna* is "to cut, to clip." Here it means "explaining and elaborating the *āyāt* (communications, signs, verses) of God," in the sense that explanation involves dissecting the content and cutting it off from hiddenness.

These two verses are the fourth and last universal address in this chapter to all humankind, following the story of Adam's garden. They refer to God's legislation of religion for the people through messengership and revelation. The core of what is being said here can also be seen in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *He said, "Get down both of you from it, all together, being enemies of one another! Then, should any guidance come to you from Me…"* (20:123). The current verses clarify that this "coming of guidance" to the people is through God's appointment of messengers.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *We have certainly sent down to you garments to cover your shameful parts* (7:26) ʿIkrimah said: This verse was revealed about the Quraysh tribe—also called al-Ḥums—and other Arab tribes that followed the same practice, including al-Aws, al-Khazraj, Khuzāʿah, Thaqīf, Banū ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿṣaʿah, and some branches of Kinānat b. Bakr. [While performing the pilgrimage,] they used to abstain from eating meat; they would enter the homes from the back; they would not wear wool or fur, but only leather; and they used to dress their children in *rihāṭ* (a scanty piece of animal skin that covered from the navel to the knees). They also circumambulated [the Kaʿbah] naked, except for the Quraysh. When they arrived [in Mecca] they would take off the clothes with which

1 The particle *mā* is called *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty). Overall, *immā* in this verse can be translated as "when," implying a condition that will surely happen. (Trans.)

they had come and throw them aside, saying: "We cleanse ourselves from sins and errors in return to our Lord by taking off these garments!" Then they would tell the Quraysh [who resided in Mecca], "Who will lend us a loincloth (*miʾzar*)?" If they did not find anything, they would go on circumambulating naked; afterwards they would pick up the clothes that they had taken off.[1]

(2) Saʿīd b. Jubayr said: People used to circumambulate the House naked and would justify it by saying, "We shall not circumambulate with garments in which we have sinned." Once a woman came, took off her clothes and started circumambulating. She covered her front with her hand and chanted:

الْيَوْمَ يَبْدُو بَعْضُهُ أَوْ كُلُّهُ وَ مَا بَدَا مِنْهُ فَلَا أُحِلُّهُ

Today shall appear part of it or all,
But to look at what appears is by no means halal.

Then these verses were revealed: *O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every place of worship… and the good things of [His] provision* (7:31-32).[2]

Author's comment: Similar accounts are narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid and ʿĀṭāʾ. However, as we explained above, these verses start with *O Children of Adam* (7:26), which indicates that what is said here is a set of universal laws for all humankind, not something specifically addressed to a certain community. These solitary reports (called *āḥād*) are not authoritative proofs, but are rather personal opinions that is narrated from these individuals (it is their ijtihad). The soundest narrations in this regard are the next two:

(3) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Since some people used to circumambulate the House naked, God commanded them to put on *zīnah* (adornment), which means *libās* (clothes, garment). It is good clothes and fabric which covers one's shameful parts and other parts.[3]

(4) Ibn ʿAbbās said: In the pre-Islamic era (*jāhiliyyah*) people used

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh.

to consider certain things unlawful while God had made them lawful, such as clothes. This is reflected in the verse: *Say, "Have you regarded what Allah has sent down for you of [His] provision, whereupon you made some of it unlawful and [some] lawful?"* (10:59). Then God revealed: *Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?" Say, "These are These are for the faithful in the life of this world"* (7:32). That is: Muslims and non-Muslims equally share in the good of this life; they both eat of its food, wear its good clothes, and marry its desirable women. Then God will exclusively assign the good things in the hereafter to the faithful. The polytheists will not have any share of that.[1]

Author's comment: As one can see, the last two narrations *match* the verse with the event [while maintaining its general meaning], as opposed to *interpreting* the verse to the event [and thus restricting its meaning]. This is how most narrations [about Qur'anic verses] should be viewed.

(5) The Messenger of God said: Any servant who does any act, whether good or evil, will [some day] wear the robe of his act in a way that he will be known for it. The Book of God confirms this: *Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is better…* (7:26).[2]

(6) ʿUthmān said: I heard the Messenger of God reciting *riyāshan*,[3] not *rīshan* [in verse 7:26].[4]

(7) Concerning verse 7:26 (*O Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you…*) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: *The garment of Godwariness* is white clothes.[5]

(8) Concerning *O Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you garments to cover your shameful parts, and adornments. Yet*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh, on the authority of al-Ḥasan.

3 *Riyāsh* is the plural of *rīsh* (lit. feathers of birds). Both words are used as singular terms for good clothes. Either way the meaning of the verse would be the same. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

5 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah, Ḥumrān and Muḥammad b. Muslim.

the garment of Godwariness—that is better (7:26) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Garments* are the clothes which you wear. *Adornments* are commodities and wealth. *The garment of Godwariness* means *ʿafāf* (piety, modesty, self-restraint). The *ʿawrah* (shame, defect, dishonor) of a pious person is never disclosed even if he lacks clothes, while the *ʿawrah* of a degenerate person is disclosed even if he is covered with clothes.[1]

Author's comment: The last two narrations provide some examples and applications for the *garment of Godwariness*, which are also found in other narrations.

(9) Concerning verse 7:28 (*When they commit an indecency, they say…*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This is about idol-worshipers. God refutes their claim by saying: *Say, "Indeed Allah does not enjoin indecencies…* (7:28).

(10) Muḥammad b. Manṣūr says: Once I asked the Imam about the verse: *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and Allah has enjoined it upon us"…* (7:28). He said, "Does anyone suppose that God would command fornication, drinking wine, or anything that is forbidden?"

"Of course not," I replied.

He said, "So what are these indecencies that they claimed God has enjoined them?"

I replied, "God and His Messenger know best."

The Imam explained, "This refers to wrongful leaders. They claimed that God has ordered them to follow certain individuals, while God had not made such an order. Thus He rejected their claim, informed us that they had ascribed a lie to Him, and called their act an indecency."[2]

Author's comment: Based on the narration in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, the

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd. The same account is narrated in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of some of our [Shia] companions, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd, on the authority of Abū Wahab, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Manṣūr. A similar narration to the same effect is reported in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Manṣūr, from "a righteous servant" (*ʿabd ṣāliḥ*).

Imam in this hadith is Imam Mūsá b. Jaʿfar [who was sometimes referred to as "a righteous servant" (*ʿabd ṣāliḥ*) due to dissimulation (*taqiyyah*)]. Based on the chain of transmission of the narration in *al-Kāfī*, we can deduce that Abū Wahab was the link between al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd and Muḥammad b. Manṣūr.

The content of this narration does not match the circumstances at the time of revelation of the verse. The argument presented in it is not accurate either, because people of the pre-Islamic era had many indecent and egregious practices that they used to ascribe to God, such as circumambulating the House naked. Nevertheless, if we move to the post-revelation period, the best match for the verse would be the wrongful leaders and oppressive rulers, as mentioned in the hadith. Indeed for several centuries the affairs of Muslims were governed by the likes of the illegitimate Ziyād b. Abīh, his son ʿUbayd-Allāh, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, and other tyrants. The courts of these rulers were always supported by a retinue of scholars who issued legal rulings about the obligation to obey them on the account of verses like: *O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those vested with authority among you* (4:59). Therefore, the above narration refers to an *application* of the verse to *after* its time of revelation.

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Whoever thinks that God orders indecency has surely attributed a lie to God. And whoever thinks that both good and evil trace to Him has surely attributed a lie to God.[1]

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Whoever thinks that God has ordered evil and indecency has surely attributed a lie to God. Whoever thinks that good and evil occur without His decree has surely stripped God of His dominion. Whoever thinks that sins are committed without God's power has surely attributed a lie to God. And whoever attributes a lie to God, God will place him in the fire.[2]

Author's comment: In the last hadith we read about "whoever thinks that good and evil occur without His decree…" This refers to the proponents of *tafwīḍ* (delegation, entrustment, unbound free will), who hold that humans are independent of God in doing either good or evil. In the narration before that, we read about "whoever thinks that both good and evil trace to Him." This refers to the advocates of *jabr* (compulsion,

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ṣadaqah.

determinism, predestination), who state that good and evil, obedience and disobedience, all stem from God's will, without the involvement of the person's choice and decision in any possible way whatsoever. It is also possible that the pronoun "him" [in "trace to him"] refers to "whoever" [that is, the human being]. If so, then that statement would again be a refutation of *tafwīḍ*.

(13) Ibn Muskān says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the verse: *Set your faces [toward Him] at every* masjid (7:29). He said: This refers to the *qiblah* (direction of prayer).[1]

Author's comment: Given our exposition above, this narration is also an example of matching and applying the verse to a different context (*jary wa inṭibāq*).

(14) Concerning *Set your faces [toward Him] at every* masjid (7:29) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: This refers to the new mosques [that are built]. People were ordered to set their faces toward the Holy Mosque [in any mosque that they may be].[2]

Author's comment: According to this hadith, the verse is saying: "In any mosque that you may be, you should turn your attention to God by turning your faces toward the *qiblah* (direction of prayer)." This is apparently what is meant by *set your faces [toward Him]*. The verse only commands the people to face the *qiblah*, without specifying what the *qiblah* is. That is defined as the Kaʿbah by other verses such as: *so turn your face toward the Holy Mosque, and wherever you may be, turn your faces toward it* (2:144). As we said in our discussion of verses about the *qiblah* [2:142-151], the Kaʿbah was designated as *qiblah* only in Medina, after the Prophet's migration. However, the current verse of discussion [7:29] is in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf, which was revealed in Mecca. Perhaps what we can say is that this verse introduced the general law of *qiblah*, which was then to be elaborated and interpreted in Medina, with the revelation of Sūrah al-Baqarah. This is assuming that the theme and context of the verses about the *qiblah* allow for such connection. This is generally true

1 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration. A similar account is narrated in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr, from either Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq.

2 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥalabī, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah, Ḥumrān and Muḥammad b. Muslim, from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

about all laws: they were introduced in a concise and overall manner in Meccan chapters, and were later differentiated, interpreted and clarified in Medinan chapters.

The narration mentions "new mosques," which include any mosque that the Muslims build anywhere in the earth. According to this narration, "setting or establishing" the face (*iqāmah*) [as mentioned in verse 7:29] is the same as "turning" the face (*tawliyah*) toward the Holy Mosque [as mentioned in verse 2:144].

(15) Concerning *Set your faces [toward Him] at every place of worship* (7:29) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means the Imams.[1]

Author's comment: Apparently what is meant here is "the leaders (imams) of congregation."[2] The next narration offers another interpretation for this.

(16) Concerning *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means the Imams.[3]

Author's comment: This is similar to the last narration. Having the leader of congregation advance and stand in the front is an adornment for the prayer. It is recommended (*mustaḥabb*) to choose righteous people in a community who are known for piety to lead the prayer. It could also be that "imam" here refers to the Infallible Imams in particular, as we shall see in a narration by al-ʿAlāʾ b. Sayābah at the end of this section [number 32].[4]

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Mihrān.

2 The narration does not specify whether it is an interpretation of *your faces* or an interpretation of *place of worship*. The former is more likely because the meaning of *masjid* (place or time of worship) is quite evident. Thus the author's explanation. The meaning would be: "Set up the most pious among you (or the Infallible Imams) as the leaders of your congregation whenever you pray." Based on the less likely possibility—that the narrations interpret *masjid* as the Imams—the meaning would be: "Set up your faces toward the leader of the congregation (or toward the Infallible Imams) whenever you pray." The same dichotomy, ambiguity and interpretations are applicable to the next narration about verse 7:31. (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Mihrān.

4 That narration says: "[It means] taking a ritual bath (*ghusl*) before visiting an Imam." This shows that "the Imams" are offered here as an interpretation for *masjid* (place or time of worship), and *ghusl* is an interpretation for *zīnah* (adornment). According to the author's first explanation, "the congregational leader" is an interpretation for *zīnah*. (Trans.)

(17) Concerning *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31) the Prophet said: Pray in your shoes.[1]

(18) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Once I was wearing a soft shirt and an elegant cloak, when ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib sent me to Ibn al-Kawwāʾ and his companions [that is, the Khārijites, to debate with them]. They rebuked me, "Even you Ibn ʿAbbās—wearing such clothes?!"
I told them, "This shall be my first argument against you. God says: *Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants?"* (7:32) and: *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31). Also, on the occasion of the two Eids, the Messenger of God used to wear two fine Yemeni garments."[2]

(19) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Imam ʿAlī sent ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿAbbās to Ibn al-Kawwāʾ and his companions while he was wearing a soft shirt and an elegant cloak. When they saw him they said, "We see you as the better of us, O Ibn ʿAbbās. How come you wear such clothes?" "This shall be," he said, "my first argument against you. *Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?* (7:32). God also says: *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31)."[3]

(20) Concerning *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: On the two Eids and Friday.[4]

(21) Once Imam al-Riḍā was asked about the verse: *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31). He said: This includes

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-ʿUqaylī, Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Anas. The same idea has been narrated from the Prophet through other chains of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī, Abū Hurayrah, Ibn Masʿūd, Shaddād b. al-Aws and others.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Yaḥyá b. Abī al-ʿAlāʾ.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Faḍalat b. Ayyūb, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Sinān. It is also narrated in *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, on the authority of Faḍalat b. Ayyūb, from the Imam. The same idea is narrated *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī* from Imam al-Ṣādiq, and in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from Imam al-Bāqir.

combing [one's hair] before every prayer.[1]

Author's comment: There are more narrations to this effect.

(22) Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī used to wear his best clothes when he wanted to pray. "O son of God's Messenger," he was asked, "why do you wear your best clothes?"

He explained: "Indeed God is beautiful and loves beauty. So I beautify myself for my Lord. He says: *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31). That is why I wear my best clothes."[2]

Author's comment: This hadith is also narrated in Sunni sources.

(23) Yūnus b. Ibrāhīm says: One day I went to see Imam al-Ṣādiq, while I was wearing a long shirt and a cloak made of fur. He looked at me and I said, "May I be your ransom! I'm wearing a long shirt and a furry cloak; what do you say about it?"

He said, "There is no problem with fur."

I added, "Its weft is silk."

He said, "And what's wrong with that, Ibrāhīm? Al-Ḥusayn was killed while he was wearing a fur shirt." Then he narrated the story of ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿAbbās meeting the Khārijites and arguing against them with the two verses [7:31-32].[3]

(24) One day Sufyān al-Thawrī saw Imam al-Ṣādiq in the Holy Mosque, clad in elegant and valuable clothes. He said [or thought], "By God I shall go to him and reprimand him [for this]." So he went close to the Imam and said, "O son of God's Messenger! Neither the Messenger of God, nor ʿAlī, nor any of your fathers, wore such clothes."

The Imam told him, "The Messenger of God used to live at a time of pressing poverty, so he used to manage his life according to his few means and his tight livelihood. But then the world opened up its abundance [upon the Muslims], and the fittest people to benefit from it are the righteous." Then he recited: *Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?"* (7:32) and added: "So we are most deserving of taking of this world what

1 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Khaythamat b. Abī Khaythamah.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

God has bestowed." The Imam then continued, "Thawrī, this garment that you see, I'm wearing it only on the top for the people." He took Sufyān's hand and pulled it toward himself, then he lifted his outer garment and showed him what he was wearing underneath: a coarse dress which was touching his skin. "This," the Imam explained, "is what I'm wearing for myself, and what you see [on top of it] is for the people." Then he grabbed and lifted Sufyān's outer garment—which was a coarse, ragged piece of clothing—and behold: inside he was wearing a soft dress. The Imam said to him, "Here you are wearing this outer garment for the people, while you're wearing this other one for yourself, which you're hiding [from the people]."[1]

(25) Ibn al-Qaddāḥ says: Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was wearing an elegant garment from Marw [or a beautiful garment]. Then ʿAbbād b. Kathīr came in, while the Imam was reclining on me—or on my father. ʿAbbād rebuked him, "O Abā ʿAbd-Allāh! You are from the household of prophethood, and your father was so-and-so.[2] So what's with this Marwī [or beautiful] garment that you're wearing? Why don't you wear a dress that is more modest?"

Imam al-Ṣādiq told him, "That's a pity, ʿAbbād! *Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?* (7:32). Indeed when God bestows a blessing upon His servant, He likes to see him with it, and there is nothing wrong with that."[3]

(26) The Messenger of God said: Indeed God likes to see the trace of His blessings on His servant.[4]

(27) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr says: Once Imam al-Riḍā told me, "What do you think about coarse clothes?"

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Abī ʿAbd-Allāh, on the authority of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

2 This apparently refers to Imam ʿAlī's asceticism. Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfī* (Iṣfahān: Maktabat al-Imām Amīr al-Muʾminīn, 1406), 20:705. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Tirmidhī (who has authenticated it), on the authority of ʿAmr b. Shuʿayb, on the authority of his grandfather through his father.

"I've been told," I replied, "that [Imam] al-Ḥasan used to wear them, and that [Imam] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad would order his new clothes to be washed in water [to look old]."

The Imam told me: "Wear [new clothes] and adorn yourself [with it]. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn used to wear a long shirt of fur worth 500 dirhams, and a cloak of fur worth 500 dinars. Once he had passed the winter with it, he would sell it and donate its price." Then the Imam recited the verse: *Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?"* (7:32).[1]

Author's comment: There are very many narrations in this regard. The next one is a fairly comprehensive one.

(28) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "Do you think that when God gives a blessing to someone, it is because of his worth? And when He deprives someone, it is because of his lack of worth? Nay! All wealth belongs to God, Who gives it to people as a trust. He has permitted them to eat moderately, drink moderately, dress moderately, marry moderately, and ride moderately; then give the remainder to the needy believers and help them out with it. Whoever does so, whatever he eats, drinks, rides and marries would be lawful, but it will be unlawful for whoever transgresses beyond that."

He then recited: *but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful* (7:31) and added: "Do you think that when a 20-dirham horse would suffice a person, God would entrust him with money to go and buy a 10,000-dirhams for himself? Or when a 20-dinar slave girl meets the needs of someone, would God give him money to go and buy one for a thousand dinars? [No, because] He says: *but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful* (7:31)."[2]

(29) One of the companions of Imam al-Ṣādiq narrates: Once I told the Imam, "We were on our way to Mecca and were about to enter the state of *iḥrām*, so we wanted to depilate. Since we did not have any bran with us to use with the depilator, we used flour instead. But then I felt so upset for this that only God knows."

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1 Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-isnād*, part of a longer hadith.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abān b. Taghlib.

The Imam asked, "Why? Because of the thought of being wasteful?" "Yes," I admitted.

The Imam said, "There is no *isrāf* (waste, extravagance, excess, prodigality) in what is good for the body. Sometimes I order flour to be mixed with [olive] oil and apply it to my body. *Isrāf* is to waste away one's property and to harm the body."

I asked, "And what is *iqtār* (parsimony, tight-fistedness)?"

He explained, "It is to eat bread and salt when you can eat better."

I inquired, "And what is *qaṣd* (the middle course, balance)?"

He said, "Eating bread with either meat, yogurt, vinegar or butter—alternating between these."[1]

(30) Imam al-Kāẓim said: Concerning the verse: *Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones, and sin and undue aggression"* (7:33), "outward indecency" means overt fornication [that is, prostitution], which was marked by flags that prostitutes used to raise [at their homes] to designate themselves. "Inward indecency" means marrying the wife of one's father. Before the Prophet's mission, when a man died, his son would marry his wife as long as she was not the mother of the son [that is, the son would marry his stepmother]. God prohibited that. And "sin" clearly means [drinking] wine.[2]

Author's comment: This is a summary of the Imam's debate with al-Mahdī [the Abbasid caliph]. We quoted it in our discussion of narrations under the verse about wine in Sūrah al-Mā'idah [5:90].[3]

(31) Muḥammad b. Manṣūr says: I asked "a righteous servant" (*ʿabd ṣāliḥ*) [Imam al-Kāẓim] about the verse: *Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones"* (7:33). He said: "Truly the Qur'an has an outward aspect and an inward layer. Whatever has been forbidden in the Book is on the outward, and its inward dimension is *a'immat al-jawr*

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Isḥāq b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Yaqṭīn, through a connected chain of transmission. It is also narrated in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*).

3 The author has quoted this under verse 2:219, which the Imam recites in support of wine being called "a great sin" in the Qur'an. See volume 3, pp. 258-259 of the English translation. (Trans.)

(wrongful leaders, illegitimate imams). Whatever has been permitted in the Book is on the outward, and its inward dimension is *aʾimmat al-ḥaqq* (rightful leaders, true imams)."[1]

Author's comment: The Imam matches sins and forbidden acts with wrongful leaders, while he matches lawful acts with rightful leaders. There are two possible explanations for this correspondence: (1) Wrongful leaders distance the people from God [just like sins and wrongful acts], while rightful leaders are a cause of nearness to God [just like obedience]. (2) Following either group will lead people to commit acts that are congruous with that leader.[2]

The two narrations that we quoted above, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Mihrān [numbers 15 and 16], can also be interpreted in this light. The next tradition is also of the same type.

(32) Concerning *Put on your adornment on every place of worship* (7:31) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: [It means] taking a ritual bath (*ghusl*) before visiting an Imam.[3]

(33) Saʿd b. ʿUbādah said, "If I ever see a man with my wife, I will surely treat him with my sword." When the Messenger of God heard about this statement he said, "Aren't you fascinated by Saʿd's *ghīrah* (protective jealousy)?[4] Yet, by God I am more *ghayūr* than he is, and God is more *ghayūr* than I am. It is out of His *ghīrah* that He has *forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and*

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. This is also narrated in *al-Kāfī*, via a connected chain of transmission, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Manṣūr. There the narration reads: "Whatever God has forbidden in the Qur'an…" and "whatever God has permitted in the Qur'an…"

2 According to this explanation, "inward" means cause or root, because the outward is a manifestation of the inward. Following a just leader will cause one to obey God, and following an unjust leader will cause one to disobey God. (Trans.)

3 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-ʿAlāʾ b. Sayābah.

4 *Ghīrah* (*ghayrah*) means "intolerance toward outsiders and intruders." It involves two aspects of protectiveness and possessiveness. *Ghīrah* can be translated as "jealousy"; and *ghayūr* as "jealous"—in the accurate technical sense of jealousy in psychology and sociology, which is different from envy (*ḥasad*). (Trans.)

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the inward ones (7:33), and no one is more *ghayūr* than God."[1]

(34) The Prophet said: No one is as *ghayūr* as the Almighty God. After all, who can be more *ghayūr* than One Who has *forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones* (7:33)?[2]

(35) Concerning *when their time comes, they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it* (7:34) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This [appointed time] is what is designated to the Angel of Death.[3]

Author's comment: We presented other narrations in this regard under the verse: *then He ordained the term [of your life], and the specified term is with Him* (6:2).[4]

Felicity and Wretchedness: A Discussion of Narrations and More

Concerning the verse: *Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return. A part [of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part* (7:29-30) Imam al-Bāqir said: When He created them, He created them as believers, disbelievers, wretched and felicitous. Thus they shall return on the Day of Resurrection, as guided and misguided.

Tafsīr al-Qummī narrates this on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd, and then quotes the Prophetic narration: "The loser is one who loses in his mother's womb, and the winner is one who wins in his mother's womb."[5]

Abū Jārūd is not known as a reliable transmitter of hadith, but the scholars have accepted his narrations from Imam al-Bāqir before his deviation. Moreover, there are other narrations which interpret the verses in the same way, such as a narration from Imam al-Bāqir on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Laythī. The same idea is found in narrations which interpret other verses on the topic of predestination (*qadar*). Overall, there are numerous narrations that, despite their variety and difference, convey one common message: that the end of the creation will be similar to its beginning; that the return of every person will be like his origin; that one who

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of al-Mughīrah b. Shuʿbah.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamzah, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

4 See volume 13, pp. 16-17 of the English translation. (Trans.)

5 A more literal translation of the hadith is: "The wretched one is one who attains wretchedness in his mother's womb, and the happy one is one who attains happiness in his mother's womb." (Trans.)

is guided at last was guided at first, and one who is misguided at last was misguided at first; that the wretched is wretched from the onset of their creation, and the successful is successful from the onset of their creation.

What these narrations and verses mean is not to assert that felicity and wretchedness are among the essential properties of people—in the sense that evenness is an essential property of number four. This possibility is totally out of the question. Such essential property can be interpreted in two ways, both of which are problematic. (1) Felicity or wretchedness is a necessary concomitant of one's essence at the level of mental image. What is meant here is that the mind derives the concepts of felicity and wretchedness from what happens in the external world, and applies them to its concepts of people's *māhiyyah* (essence, quiddity). All this is subsequent to the occurrence of beings, acts and results in the world of existence (*wujūd*). Such essential property is devoid of any real impact or practical significance. (2) Felicity or wretchedness is a necessary, inseparable and independent requirement of one's substance. This means that God's job is only to bring out what is hidden in the person's essence, which entails a limitation on God's absolute dominion and a restriction of His authority. That would be contrary to the Qur'an, the sunnah, and reason.

This idea contradicts reason because rational people conduct their affairs based on the assumption that education and training have an impact on the souls. They are unanimous about this principle, and agree on classifying actions as good or evil, and assigning praise and blame to them. It is also against the idea that God has completed His argument against the people through sending religions, scriptures and messengers.[1] If one's actions and destiny are already embedded in one's substance as essential properties—meaning properties that are impossible to be separated from the person—then it does not make sense to offer any proof, argument or guidance to the person. There is no consistent way of conceiving this.

The picture the Holy Qur'an draws for us also confirms a rational system of human life based on the free will of the people. The Qur'an says that God created humans from dust, *then He made their progeny from an extract of a base fluid* (32:8). He makes them grow in a splendid fashion, until He blesses them with maturity and reason, whereby they act voluntarily and can distinguish between good and bad, virtue and vice, benefit and loss, obedience and disobedience, reward and punishment. He then

1 This refers to verse 4:165. (Trans.)

blesses them by directing His religious obligations to them. Those who follow their reason and obey their Lord with respect to His commands and prohibitions will be happy and rewarded with the best of rewards. Those who oppose their reason, follow their desires, and disobey their Lord will be wretched and will taste the consequence of their deeds. This life is an abode of test and trial: today is the time for action, and tomorrow is the time for retribution.

As one can see, this Qur'anic picture is based on two principles: (1) There is a difference between voluntary and involuntary acts. This is a rational, necessary statement. (2) Voluntary acts can be described as good or evil, and can win either praise and reward, or blame and punishment. This is also a rule of reason and a governing principle which gives order to human societies. Hence no rational person can deny it.

These are two indubitable and unquestionable premises which prove that felicity and wretchedness are connected to the voluntary acts of the people. Hence, there is no place whatsoever to hold that felicity and wretchedness are essential properties—in the sense that we discussed above. The Qur'anic verses and narrations in this regard do not tie people's ends to their essences *per se*, but they tie people's ends to God's creation and existentiation.[1] Nevertheless, we need to explore the meaning of these verses and narrations further.

Narrations which match the return to the beginning are abundant in number, and vary from one another in terms of their text and context, much like the verses in this regard. We can classify these narrations under five categories:

I. Succinct Narrations in Broad Terms

Some of these narrations discuss the matter in a concise way without further elaboration. They state that when God created the people, He created them as two classes: wretched and happy, or disbelievers and

1 The difference here is about ascription. One's end is not a result of a rigid *māhiyyah* (quiddity, substance, essence) which determines the person's felicity or wretchedness by virtue of itself. Rather, any complete or incomplete causation is traceable to God's doing, Who gives different capacities and inclinations to the people. Since things are not tied to a fixed essence, but to God's will, His hands are always open to make any modifications. For a more complete and decisive explanation, see the section entitled "A Deeper Layer of Meaning." (Trans.)

believers. Abū Jārūd's narration, which we quoted above, is an example of such hadiths. Another example is a narration that we quoted from *al-Kāfī* about the embryonic development under the verse: *It is He who forms you in the wombs however He wills* (3:6).[1]

These narrations correspond to verses like: *It is He who created you. Then some of you are faithless and some of you are faithful* (64:2); *He knows you best since [the time] He produced you from the earth, and since you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. So do not flaunt your piety: He knows best those who are Godwary* (53:32); *as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return. A part [of humankind] He has guided, while error is fixed upon a part…* (7:29-30).

There is not much of a problem with these verses, because as their context shows, and as we can see more expressly stated in the last example [7:29-30], they talk about an overall decree from God that humankind shall be divided into two groups. However, whether a person belongs to this group or that will be determined through one's voluntary acts during one's life, and that is the source of one's felicity or wretchedness. Each person will qualify for either being blessed with guidance from God, or being doomed to error through Satan's guardianship. In other words, what is decreed at the beginning of creation is only a *conditional* decree. It becomes absolute and finalized later on through one's voluntary deeds.

II. Narrations about *ṭīnah* (Clay, Substance)

There are some narrations which are more explicit than the previous group, saying that God created the people from different substances. He created some out of clay from paradise, and created others out of clay from hell; each group will return to where it came from. Here are three examples, while there are many other similar narrations:

(1) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn said: God made a covenant between our followers (*shīʿah*) and us over our *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority); thus they neither increase nor decrease [in number]. Indeed God created us from the clay of ʿIlliyyūn (the Highest Heaven, the Elevated Record), and He created our followers from a clay that is inferior to that. He created our enemies from the clay of Sijjīn (the Lowest Hell, the Infernal Record), and

1 See volume 5, pp. 20ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

He created their followers from a clay that is inferior to that.[1]

(2) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Kaysān says: I introduced myself to Imam al-Ṣādiq: "May I be your ransom! I am one of your friends, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Kaysān."

He said, "Now I know your name, but I do not recognize you."

I said, "I was born in al-Jabal[2] and was raised in Fārs. When I interact with people in my business and other dealings, sometimes I see a man who is righteous, morally sound, and trustworthy; but when I get to know him more, I realize that he is among your enemies. And sometimes I interact with a man that I find to be morally corrupt, untrustworthy, and vile in conduct; but when I learn more about him, I find out that he is among your friends. How is that possible?" "O Ibn Kaysān, you should know that God took some clay from paradise and some clay from hell. He mixed them together, then He separated them again. The trustworthiness, good conduct and righteousness that you see in the first group are because they came in touch with the clay of paradise. Yet, they will go back to what they were created from. The untrustworthiness, evil conduct and vileness that you saw in the second group are because they came in touch with the clay of hell. Yet, they will go back to what they were created from."[3]

(3) Imam ʿAlī said: Indeed God created Adam from the outer layer of the earth, which includes poor, rich and salty lands. Thus his descendants include both righteous and unrighteous.[4]

The first narration about the clay of ʿIlliyyūn and Sijjīn refers to these verses in the Qur'an: *No indeed! The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn. And what will show you what is Sijjīn? It is a written record. Woe to the deniers on that day* (83:7-10); *No indeed! The record of the pious is indeed in ʿIlliyyūn. And what will show you what is ʿIlliyyūn? It is a written record, witnessed by those brought near [to Allah]* (83:18-21). We shall discuss these verses in their own place, if God wills.

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1 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*.

2 This is a general designation for the lands lying between Azerbaijan, Iraq and Fārs, including Hamadān and Kurdistān. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Maḥāsin*.

4 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of Ḥabbat al-ʿUranī.

The last narration provides some explanation for the one before it, because it implies that there is some relationship between the qualities and conditions of people—in terms of being righteous or unrighteous—and the earthly matter from which they are created. This complies with our first-hand experience: different matters are inevitably different in terms of what form they can adopt[1] and what effects they can cause—although this difference is at the level of preponderance (*iqtiḍāʾ*), not complete causation (*ʿilliyyat tāmmah*).

Therefore, if we put together what is said in these narrations—that we are made of some clay from the earth, and that our origin is either paradise or hell—we can deduce that parts of earth belong to paradise and parts of it belong to hell. Each part will certainly end up where it belongs, but the process of each part reaching where it belongs is through our doing. The earth first becomes a human, and then we either purify ourselves and thus enter paradise; or we plunge into darkness, whereby we enter hell and become fuel for the fire. This is what determines if one's original earthen substance is congruent with heaven or hell.

The following verse bears some allusion to this idea, where the inhabitants of paradise will say [after they enter paradise on the Day of Resurrection]: *All praise belongs to Allah, who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish* (39:74). Apparently what is meant by "earth" here is the very earth where humans live, where they die, and whence they are raised. This "earth" is used interchangeably with "paradise" in this verse. Another verse that refers to the same point is: *The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens [as well]* (14:48). In short, apparently what is meant by "the clay of paradise" and "the clay of hell" in the narrations is "the clay which *will* become part of paradise or hell *in future*." This interpretation is especially strengthened by certain expressions such as "the clay of ʿIlliyyūn" and "the clay of Sijjīn" [in the first narration], as well as "the clay of paradise" and "the clay of hell" [in the second narration].

What is meant is that humans are physically made of an earthly matter which may be either good or bad. This matter has a direct impact on the comprehension, feelings and faculties of the person. When these feelings

1 Here matter (*māddah*) is meant in its metaphysical sense, meaning a substance in a potential state. It becomes actualized by adopting a form (*ṣūrah*), which is an actualizing substance. (Trans.)

and faculties—which are based on one's material substance—start working, they consolidate one's material substance. In other words, there is a mutual relationship between our substance and our actions and tendencies. Hence we continue to act and grow, until we develop fully into either a felicitous or a wretched individual, according to the means and causes that God has arranged and willed. At the same time God maintains the right to *badā*ʾ (alteration, apparent change of the course of events) by bringing in other means and causes that are stronger [than one's original substance], which can change the course of one's development, and can override the influence of its opposing factors.

All we can say is that one's earthly substance has *some* impact on leading a felicitous or a wretched life. Yet, there are countless other factors which figure in here. We only know a few general and obvious ones which are negligible compared to what we do not know. Some of the factors that we know are the wellness of parents, proper nutrition, and the climate where one lives. For instance, one whose seed is conceived properly and develops fully in a healthy womb, and then feeds on proper nutrients, breathes clean air and grows in a sound environment, will have a greater potential to grow to perfection, will have a sharper mind and a more discerning comprehension, and will be stronger in action. Having the right genes and being conceived properly, as well as living in a moderate climate, will prepare the person to better absorb human perfections. On the contrary, people who grow in places with harsh climates and unsuitable air and water—such as equatorial and arctic lands—are more prone to developing undesirable qualities such as harshness, hard-heartedness and weak intelligence.

A physical makeup that is free from impediments of intellectual precision will give rise to a fair spirit with a discerning intellect and subtle emotions, which will guide the person toward human perfections through the person's beliefs, will and actions. The person's intellectual and emotional capacity will also guide them to maintain their physical wellness, which will in turn further consolidate the person's spirit and actions. This mutual strengthening continues until one's potentialities fully materialize. The same reciprocation is true on the side of wretchedness, *mutatis mutandis*. There are several verse which confirm this idea, such as: *As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and Allah is indeed with the virtuous* (29:69); *Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds*

was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them (30:10). Despite all this, there are a myriad of other causes and factors which can influence how one turns out, but we are ignorant of them. We only know that they exist because of rare instances where people develop in a way that we would have never expected given their background. Indeed it is God *Who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living* (10:31, 30:19).

Overall, what we can say is that one's success in life—both in terms of knowledge and practice—has a direct relationship with having a suitable material substance. It is one's material substance which determines what kind of spirit may develop with the body, and that spirit is the basis of the person finding their way to either paradise or hell. The same can be said about wretchedness, where wretchedness in knowledge means abandoning one's reason, and relying on illusions and superstitions which embellish the forces of appetite and anger to the person. Likewise, wretchedness in practice means indulging in material pleasures, yielding to carnal desires, and defiantly rejecting any truth that does not match one's interests.

The above means that one's birth is a material cause which pushes the person to either truth or falsehood, either felicity or wretchedness, either paradise or hell. However, this cause is called a preponderant cause, not a complete cause. In other words, God's decree may bring in another cause which overrules its opposing forces. This is mentioned in the narration which we quoted at the beginning of Sūrah Āl-i ʿImrān,[1] about the creation of the fetus. There are also other narrations which state that God's will and decree can always make changes to affairs through effacement and confirmation (*maḥw wa ithbāt*).[2]

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1 See volume 5 (2nd ed.), pp. 20ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 A complete cause (*ʿillat tāmmah*) consists of three things: (1) existence of the necessary preponderant cause (*muqtaḍī*); (2) existence of every condition (*sharṭ*); (3) non-existence of every impediment (*māniʿ*). A common example is the process of burning: fire is the preponderant cause; it must be in proximity of the fuel as a condition; and there must be no barriers that prevent combustion. This is according to Islamic philosophy, which recognizes events as *conditional* causes (which is another translation for *muqtaḍī*), and where God's will operates at the same plane (called horizontally, *ʿarḍī*) by either removing a condition or introducing an impediment. In Islamic mysticism (*ʿirfān*), this is taken a step forward, where there is no cause—whether absolute or conditional—except the Absolute Cause. What is commonly called a cause

A Deeper Layer of Meaning

There is yet another possible explanation for these narrations, which is more advanced, requires a high level of intellectual precision, and is based on a profound understanding of metaphysical principles. The integral element in one's felicity or wretchedness is one's degree of consciousness, which is one's intellectual realization. This is something immaterial and unbound by the laws and restrictions of material phenomena, including time. Time is a measure of change, and as such it is an exclusive aspect of material events.[1] We see a material substance transforming from potentiality to actualization, and thus conclude that "felicity occurs *after* one's actions." However, this is only when we look at it from the perspective of the material substance. Otherwise, felicity in itself is not temporal. It is not something that exists in one time or another because it is not a material reality. Therefore, "prior felicity" and "future felicity" are identical; the distinction comes in only when we map out the movement of a time-bound entity.

This is exactly what happens when we talk about the acts of God occurring "in time." For instance we say, "God created Zayd on such a day"; "That is when God drowned Noah's tribe"; "He rescued Jonah's people in the *x*th century"; or "He appointed Muḥammad as prophet in year *y*." In these examples, God's action is temporal because we are not looking at it in its entirety. What happens in time is only one aspect of God's doing, divested of the other aspects. Otherwise, in the broad scheme of things, God is the creator of an event with *all* its features, including its time and the preparatory changes which give rise to it. This means that God's act is

(*sabab*, *ʿillah*) is only seemingly and apparently so, but not in reality. All forces and factors in creation are like sleeves which cover the hand which extends through them and effects changes. They are all expressions, extensions and reflections of the only real cause. There is no contradiction, nor any real duality, in the working of different members of the same body. It is a single subject which employs different organs to what he wills, according to their capacity and based on his wisdom. This is called "vertical agency" (*fāʿiliyyah ṭūliyyah*). (Trans.)

1 Here both "time" and "matter" are meant in their metaphysical sense. Time is "the yardstick of change," and change, by definition, means "transition from a state of potentiality to actualization." Having a state of potentiality is identical to being material. Philosophical matter means "potentiality," and prime matter (*materia prima*) means "pure potentiality." (Trans.)

not bound by time, but sits higher than the plane of temporal events. We qualify God's acts by time because it is in a sense united with a temporal incident that we observe from our perspective in the temporal world. Another example is when we talk about our comprehension as a temporal event, like when we say, "Today I learnt this and that" or "Now I see." Knowledge qua knowledge is not temporal. What is temporal is the mental processes and neural activities that *prepare* the person to have a certain realization and serve as an *occasion* for understanding.[1] But because of the connection between the two, we speak as if comprehension is a temporal process in its essence.

Given the most apparent meaning of Qur'an and hadith, there is a physical paradise and a physical hell in the hereafter. However, this does not mean that the hereafter is temporal and material like this world. Rather, physical reward or punishment *coincides* with one's felicity or wretchedness, which are immaterial by nature. Whether one is felicitous or wretched is determined by one's final state of consciousness and awakening.[2] Since this, by essence, is an immaterial reality—meaning that it lies above the plane of time—then at that level it does not make any difference whether we talk about past or future. Once one transcends time, the distinction between "before" and "after" disappears, and what is otherwise called "the beginning" coincides with what is otherwise called "the return" [as matched in verse 7:29]. The reader must reflect on this.

III. Narrations about Potable and Briny Waters

Some narrations say that God created the people from either sweet

1 Occasion here is meant in its philosophical sense, which is distinct from "cause." (Trans.)

2 This discussion is based on a metaphysical principle that knowledge is immaterial, which means that it is indivisible, and is not bound by time and space. When we are fully aware of something—an object, an incident, a feeling—our consciousness transcends past and future, even though we, as a subject, live in time. The realm of afterlife is *eternal*, not *perpetual*. While perpetuity means *infinite time*, eternity means being *timeless* or *above time*, and therefore *changeless*. The same can be said about God and other immaterial beings. From this, the author has intelligently deduced that our existence in the hereafter is not based on a material substance as in this world, but it is based on a conscious substance—notwithstanding all its ambiguity for us being caged by time. (Trans.)

and agreeable water, or from salty and bitter water. For instance:

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: God made some potable water and then He created the people of obedience from it. He also made some bitter water and then He created the people of disobedience from it. Then He ordered the two waters to mix. Had He not done that, a believer would only give birth to a believer, and a disbeliever would only give birth to a disbeliever.[1]

(2) Ibn Sinān says: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the first thing that God created. He replied, "The first thing that the Almighty God created was that from which He created everything." I inquired, "And what is that?"

"Water," he said.

The Imam then explained: "God created two seas of water, one sweet and one briny. Once He created them, He looked at the sweet one and said, 'O sea!'

It replied, 'Here I am, at Thy service!'

He said, 'My blessing and mercy shall be in you. From you I shall create the people of My obedience and My paradise.'

Then He looked at the briny one and said, 'O sea!' But it did not reply. He called it up to three times and it did not respond. He said, 'My curse shall be upon you. From you I shall create the people of My disobedience and those whom I shall settle in My fire.' Then He commanded them to mix, so they mixed."

The Imam added at the end: "That is why a believer is born to a disbeliever, and a disbeliever is born to a believer."[2]

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: God ordered some water: "Be sweet and agreeable so that I may create from you My paradise and the people of My obedience." He ordered some other water: "Be salty and bitter so that I may create from you My fire and the people of My disobedience." Then He applied the two waters on clay.[3]

There are numerous other narrations—from Imams ʿAlī, al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq and others—which convey the same idea as each of the above. We quoted these three as a sample. These narrations can be matched with

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1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, part of a longer hadith, on the authority of ʿUthmān b. ʿĪsá, on the authority of some of his companions.

verses like: *Allah created you from dust, then from a drop of [seminal] fluid, then He made you mates. No female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge, and no elderly person advances in years, nor is anything diminished of his life, but it is [recorded] in a Book. That is indeed easy for Allah. Not alike are the two seas: this one sweet and agreeable, pleasant to drink, and that one briny and bitter, and from each you eat fresh meat and obtain ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships plowing through them, that you may seek of His grace, and so that you may give thanks* (35:11-12). The first verse [35:11] is about how individuals differ from one another despite being of the same species and having common enjoyments and benefits. Then the second verse [35:12] provides an example to clarify and illustrate this.

Elsewhere God says: *and We made every living thing out of water* (21:30). Another verse in this regard is: *It is He who created the human being from water, then invested him with ties of blood and marriage, and your Lord is all-Powerful* (25:54). We shall discuss these verses in their own place.

This set of narrations can be classified into two categories:

(1) Some of them say that the two types of water—one being sweet and agreeable, and one being salty and bitter—were applied to the clay which was the substance of humankind's creation. That is the source of difference in the substance of people. This boils down to the previous set of narrations about the differences of people being traceable to to their clay. Hence, the same explanations that we provided there would be applicable to these narrations.

(2) Some of them say that creation as a whole—including the creation of humankind and other things, even paradise and hell—is from water, and the felicity and wretchedness of the people is because they are made of different waters. In other words, the differences in creation are rooted in being created of either potable or briny water. This again boils down to the previous set of narrations about *ṭīnah* (clay, substance), and the same discussion would apply here. Hence, the first category serves to interpret the second, and all of them serve to interpret the previous set of narrations about *ṭīnah*.

There is also the idea that at the end, the creation will return to its origin, which was water. This is another topic which we shall discuss later in its appropriate place, by God's will.

IV. Narrations about Creation from Light and Darkness

Some narrations state that the difference of people is because they were created from either light or darkness. One example is:

> Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "Indeed God created us [Ahl al-Bayt] from a light that was drawn from another light that is ingrained in the *ṭīnah* (clay, substance) from the top of ʿIlliyyūn (the Highest Heaven, the Elevated Record). He created the hearts of our followers (lit. *shīʿah*) from what He created our bodies from, and created their bodies from a lower substance. So their hearts incline toward us because they are created from what we are created from." The Imam then recited: *No indeed! The record of the pious is indeed in ʿIlliyyūn. And what will show you what is ʿIlliyyūn? It is a written record, witnessed by those brought near [to Allah]* (83:18-21).
>
> He continued: "Indeed God created the heart of our enemies from a *ṭīnah* from Sijjīn (the Lowest Hell, the Infernal Record), and created their bodies from a lower substance. He created the hearts of their followers from what He created their bodies from; that is why their hearts incline toward them." Then He recited: *No indeed! The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn. And what will show you what is Sijjīn? It is a written record. Woe to the deniers on that day* (83:7-10).[1]

This, and other similar narrations, reduce to the second set of narrations that we discussed above, concerning the origin of creation tracing to either the clay of ʿIlliyyūn or the clay of Sijjīn. However, they specify that after the stage of clay, the substance of people becomes either light or darkness. Apparently light and darkness here symbolize knowledge and ignorance, respectively. A felicitous substance reflects the truths and leads to knowledge, while a wretched substance is intertwined with ignorance and blindness. This means that the *ṭīnah* of felicity is light. This language has its roots in the Qur'an, which frequently refers to knowledge and guidance as light, just as it refers to *īmān* (belief, faith) as life. God says: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?* (6:122); *Allah is the Guardian of the faithful:*

1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

He brings them out of darkness into light. As for the faithless, their patrons are the Rebels, who drive them out of light into darkness (2:257). There are abundant other narrations which say that light was the original substance for the creation of a set of beings such as the prophets, the angels, the Tablet, the Pen, the Throne, the Pedestal, and paradise. We shall present some of these under other relevant verses, if God wills.

V. Narrations about Merging the Deeds of Good-doers and Evil-doers

Some narrations talk about the good deeds of the wretched being added to [the record] of the felicitous, and the evil deeds of the felicitous being added to the record of the wretched. One example for this is found in part of a long narration from Imam al-Bāqir, on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Laythī:

> … Then the Imam asked me: "Tell me, Ibrāhīm, when the sun rises and shines its rays on different lands, do the ray separate from the disk?"
> I said, "When it rises, the rays are separate [from the disk]."
> "Isn't it true," the Imam ask, "that when it sets, the rays return and connect back to the disk?"
> "Yes," I confirmed.
> He explained, "In the same way everything will return to its original substance and root. On the Day of Resurrection, God will remove anything that is congruous with our enemies (sing. *nāṣīb*)—including their [dark] substance and it resulting sins and burdens—from the believers, and will add them all to our enemies [because of their essential congruence]. He will also remove anything that is congruous with the believers—including their substance and their various good deeds and efforts—from our enemies, and will add them all to the believers. Now, do you think there is any injustice and aggression in this?"
> "No, O son of God's Messenger."
> He said, "By God this is a decisive decree, a definitive rule, and clear justice. *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23). This, O Ibrāhīm, is *the truth from your Lord; so do not be among the skeptics* (3:60). This is a law of *malakūt* (God's kingdom, angelic world)."

> "O son of God's Messenger," I asked, "what is the law of *malakūt*?" "That is the law of God, the law of His prophets, and the story of al-Khiḍr and Moses—when Moses accompanied al-Khiḍr, but al-Khiḍr told him: *Indeed you cannot have patience with me! And how can you have patience about something you are not in the know of?* (18:67-68). Contemplate this, Ibrāhīm, and fathom it. Moses criticized al-Khiḍr and condemned his acts, until al-Khiḍr told him, 'Moses, *I did not do that out of my own accord* (18:82), but I only did that based on God's command.'…"[1]

This narration corresponds to the verse: *so that Allah may separate the bad ones from the good, and place the bad on one another, and pile them up together, and cast them into hell* (8:37) and other verses which are mentioned in the above hadith. As one can see, this verse says that God will separate good from evil on the Day of Resurrection and will completely distinguish between them, such that there remains good without any mix of evil, and evil without any mix of good. Then He will pile up all evil together, meaning that He gathers everything of evil nature: He will join people's actions and results with the subjects who have done them; He will connect the branches back to their roots. The implication of this is that all virtues will be gathered at one end and connected back to pure felicity of essence, which is completely free from any tinge of wretchedness. Likewise, all vices will be gathered at another end and connected back to their unmixed source of origination. This is what the above narration tries to explain.

When the Imam asks Ibrāhīm about the sun and its rays, he is providing a physical image for the idea that every effect is a reflection of its cause, is of the same nature, depends on it, and is inseparable from it. The statement that "By God this is a decisive decree…" is based on the necessary congruence that exists between a subject and his actions, or between a cause and its effect. This entails that the real owner of every act is a subject whose *essence* is congruous with that act, not one who has no connection with the act [at the level of one's essence]. This is despite our prima facie impression that such a judgment is unfair, because that impression is only at the surface level, based on outward senses [not based on one's essential realization and substantial tendency].

Every act has two aspects: (1) It is a set of certain movements which

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1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

is attributable to the subject who makes those movements. This aspect of the act belongs to the apparent actor. (2) It is described as either good or evil, either felicitous or wretched. This aspect of the act belongs to the essence which has the same moral value and quality. At this level, suppose there are two different causes, each having its distinct effect. Then suppose we find the effect of one manifesting from the other. This is impossible unless there is some mix between the two causes, where the real cause of the observed effect stands behind the apparent cause that is thought to be the source of the event. For instance, we may observe heat in water, but that is only because the water is heated by fire or sun [as the real source of heat]. The heat appears in water, but in reality it is a property of fire. One who investigates the truth would never fail to attribute an effect to its real source, as opposed to where it apparently manifests.

Based on the above clarification, we can say that good deeds belong to those who are good-doers by virtue of their essence, and have a felicitous substance. Similarly, evil deeds belong to those who are evil-doers by virtue of their essence, and have a wretched root and substance. This is genuine justice, which shall appear in the realm of truth [that is, the hereafter] based on the reality of everything.

What is said here does not contradict verses which say: *So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:7-8); *that no bearer shall bear another's burden* (53:38); *Whatever [good] it earns is to its benefit, and whatever [evil] it incurs is to its harm* (2:286). These verses assert that the consequence of every act should accrue to its doer: if the act is good, then they will be rewarded good, and if the act is evil, then they will receive evil. What is mentioned in these verses is correct in its own place. From a worldly point of view and conventionally speaking, "action" refers to a set of physical movements. Given this notion of action, the "actor" would obviously be the person who makes those movements. So worldly reward and praise, or punishment and blame, would accrue to the person who does the act in this sense. This is where the above verses are applicable. However, from the point of view of reality, the true actor of an act is one whose essence is in line and harmony with the act, which is not necessarily the person who makes the outward movements called "action." Therefore, saying that the act and its good or evil consequences belong to the essence from which it originated is not a violation of these verses, because we are not

ascribing the act to a source where it does not belong. In other words, we have two laws at two levels, with a vertical relationship[1] between them: (1) an apparent law which governs our social interactions in this world; and (2) a hidden law which the Imam referred to as "the law of *malakūt*."

As we have repeatedly said, the Day of Resurrection is a day when the secrets are examined [86:9], when the truth manifests and nothing conceals it anymore. That realm is where the law of *malakūt* comes into play and connects every event to its real subject. That is when everything returns to its origin. God says: *and there will appear to them from Allah what they had never reckoned* (39:47); *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today* (50:22); *We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from [the reward of] their deeds* (52:21); *But surely they will carry their own burdens and other burdens along with their own burdens* (29:13).

Here we can see why the law of *malakūt* is specifically designated to the Day of Resurrection, and not to the *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this life and the Resurrection). The *barzakh*—which lies between one's death and the Resurrection—is also a time of retribution and among "the days of God" [14:5]. However, the Qur'an counts it as an *extension* of people's stay on the earth and this world, as one can infer from these verses: *He will say, "How many years did you remain on earth?" They will say, "We remained for a day, or part of a day; yet ask those who keep the count." He will say, "You only remained a little; if only you had known"* (23:112-114); *And on the day when the Hour sets in the guilty will swear that they had remained only for an hour. That is how they were used to lying [in the world]. But those who were given knowledge and faith will say, "Certainly you remained in Allah's Book until the Day of Resurrection. This is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know"* (30:55-56). Our life in the *barzakh* is like a remainder of our worldly life, and thus it is subject to some of the same laws. In the *barzakh* people are still in the process of being filtered and purified, in their way to their ultimate felicity or wretchedness. The decisive decree [of attaching actions to their real actors] requires total congruence and a pure essence, which is realized only after the *barzakh*.

1 I explained the technical meaning of "vertical relationship" above, in the section entitled "Back to Iblīs." Here, what is meant is that the apparent and hidden laws do not contradict because they pertain to two different planes. Each has its own scope and application. (Trans.)

Given the above explanations, we can now understand another important idea which is mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith: that God rewards the good deeds of disbelievers in this world, but in the hereafter their actions will be void, no scale will be set up for them on the Day of Resurrection [18:105], and they shall have nothing but fire at that point. The reader should reflect on this.

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God's Actions are not Open to Question

In the above narration, the Imam quoted the verse, *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23) as a justification for what he said about the law of *malakūt* (God's kingdom, angelic world). When someone does an act, makes a judgment, or utters a speech, we may ask the person to justify it for us by explaining the correspondence between the reality and his action or speech. Such questions are applicable when we are dealing with two things that are distinct and separable from one another: an action or speech on the one hand, and the truth on the other hand. There is room for question in such cases until it is clarified that what the person did or said matches reality. However, if the person's action, judgment or statement is the reality itself, then there is no room for question, because there is no intermediating link to connect the person's action or speech with the fact of the matter.

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When you are questioned about something that you have done, judged, or said, then you are bound to that question unless you clarify the truth behind your action, judgment, or statement. For instance, if one inquires, "Why did you hit the orphan?" or "Why did you judge that this property belongs to Zayd?" or "Why did you say that Zayd is standing?" then you are bound to that question unless you provide an explanation like "I hit the orphan to discipline him"; "Zayd inherits this property from his father"; or "I saw with my own eyes that Zayd was standing." Meanwhile, there are other statements that are not open to question, such as: "Four is even"; "Ten is greater than five"; "One ceases to be alive if his head is chopped off." The reason is that these statements are the very reality of the matter, not something to be matched and verified with the truth. Hence, it does not make sense to ask, "Why is four even?" or "What makes ten greater than five?" When the complete cause of an event is realized, then the event will inevitably occur. In such cases, it is vain to ask "Why did

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this effect come to be?" because its efficient cause and final cause are there.[1]

In the case of God, His actions are the very realm of existence, and His speech is the very external reality. There is no other reality to corroborate His acts and speech. That is why there is no place for asking "why" and "how" with respect to Him. God's act is the reality with which we assess the truth of all our beliefs and actions. We infer truths from the external world, which is the making of God. Hence, our inferences about the truth have no rule over His acts, but are rather deduced from His acts. The two are concomitant in the sense that our sense of truth [in beliefs] and right [in actions] follows His act [of creation]. The reader should reflect on this.

We can explain this in a different way: God always acts through the intermediation of causes which govern the world. These causes are the means and instruments which manifest God's acts.[2] When one asks about God's act, the person is really asking about the means through which God has acted. It reveals the person's ignorance about the causes at work. For example, suppose Zayd dies because of a wall collapsing on him unexpectedly. Then one would ask, "Why did God kill Zayd? Why didn't He have mercy on his young age and his poor parents?" So they explain to him that Zayd died because the wall collapsed on him. Then he would ask, "Why did the wall collapse on him?" They tell him that the wall's foundation had become weak and unsupportive due to rain; that is why it could not carry the weight of the wall anymore, and it so happened

1 Questioning an act means inquiring about either the efficient cause or the final cause of the act. The efficient cause (*al-ʿillat al-fāʿiliyyah*) of an act is the subject which does the act and thus brings it to existence. The final cause (*al-ʿillat al-ghāʿiyyah*) of an act is its *raison d'être*, or a goal that the subject aims to achieve through the act. In the case of divine acts, God is both the efficient cause and the final cause: there is no other source of existence but Him that may give existence to the event, and there is no perfection beyond Him that may justify His action. His acts issue from His essence *because* of His perfection. He Himself suffices to justify His acts. That is why in the case of divine acts there is no room to inquire about some other efficient or final cause. In short: *He is the First and the Last* (57:3). (Trans.)

2 According to Islamic philosophy, God is the only real cause of any phenomenon. All other "causes" are rather "preparatory causes" or "occasions" (called *muʿiddāt*) which enable the recipient to receive God's grace (that is, existence). According to Islamic mysticism (*ʿirfān*), the other causes are reflections and manifestations of God's causality at work. (Trans.)

that Zayd was right there when it collapsed. But then he would move on to the next question about why it rains, and the inquiry continues. A question is always about an event whose cause is unknown. Otherwise, if one knows the cause, then one would not question the occurrence of its effect. The problem is that the person assumes the chain of causes which support one's life is secure from sudden death. That is why when Zayd dies unexpectedly, the person cannot imagine a cause that justifies it, so he concludes that it was a groundless act by God. Thus the person asks about the basis behind the event. If one knows about the causes which give rise to events, then one would not have any question. We also had a previous discussion on the verse, *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23) when we discussed Satan's objections in his dialogue with the angels.[1]

In the above narration, the Imam mentioned "the law of God and the law of His prophets…" This refers to God's judgment and decree, and the judgment of His prophets with His permission. God's decree and judgment is based on the truth and the fact of the matter in the real world, unlike our judgments which are based on signs and indications.

The above should clarify how good deeds and their consequences are added to good essences which have a substance of light, and how evil deeds and their consequences belong to evil essences which have a substance of darkness. Also, our explanation about the verse, *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23) should clarify another series of questions that may potentially arise here. One may ask: "Why is it that good essences which have a substance of light are tied to good deeds and good consequences? Why is it that evil essences which have a substance of darkness are tied to sins and evil consequences? Why do good deeds result in eternal bliss and everlasting paradise? Why do evil deeds result in God's punishment and hell?"[2]

The answer is: There is a necessary existential connection between these essences and what issues from them in the real world. It is not an arbitrary assignment based on a social contract, even though in religious language it is sometimes expressed in a way that is similar to our

1 See the section entitled "God cannot be Questioned about His Actions." (Trans.)

2 In other words: Why not vice versa? Why do these essences not result in the opposite actions and consequences? (Trans.)

conventional laws which we have set up to govern our societies as a complement to religious laws. We explained this above in our discussion on the result of deeds.[1]

It is an essential property of a good or evil source to have a consequence which is congruent with it, and essential properties are not open to question.[2] However, the idea that the essential property of a being is inseparable from it does not mean that the being is an independent cause of that effect. It does not mean that the beings can necessitate their essential consequences and bind them to themselves independently of God. The Qur'an rejects this notion. Rather, what necessitates these consequences is that they are part of God's doing, and His acts are not open to question as we just explained. God refers to this necessary consequence using an example in the verse: *The good land—its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely* (7:58). The verse adds *by the permission of its Lord* as a qualification to clarify that no being is independent of God in effecting its essential properties. The following Prophetic narration also refers to the same notion of essential consequence: "The pen [of decree] has dried (*jaff al-qalam*) with the inscription of felicity for one who believes and is self-restrained."

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1 See the section entitled "Two Forms of Human Knowledge." (Trans.)

2 See my first footnote under the section entitled "Detailed Response to Satan's Objections." (Trans.)

Verses 37-53

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِباً أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآياتِهِ أُولٰئِكَ يَنالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُمْ
مِنَ الْكِتابِ حَتَّى إِذا جاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنا يَتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قالُوا أَيْنَ ما كُنْتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ
دُونِ اللَّهِ قالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَ شَهِدُوا عَلى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كانُوا كافِرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾ قالَ
ادْخُلُوا فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَ الْإِنْسِ فِي النَّارِ كُلَّما دَخَلَتْ
أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَها حَتَّى إِذَا ادَّارَكُوا فِيها جَمِيعاً قالَتْ أُخْراهُمْ لِأُولاهُمْ رَبَّنا هؤُلاءِ
أَضَلُّونا فَآتِهِمْ عَذاباً ضِعْفاً مِنَ النَّارِ قالَ لِكُلٍّ ضِعْفٌ وَ لٰكِنْ لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَ
قالَتْ أُولاهُمْ لِأُخْراهُمْ فَما كانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنا مِنْ فَضْلٍ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذابَ بِما
كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا وَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْها لا تُفَتَّحُ لَهُمْ
أَبْوابُ السَّماءِ وَ لا يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ حَتَّى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ الْخِياطِ وَ كَذٰلِكَ
نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ لَهُمْ مِنْ جَهَنَّمَ مِهادٌ وَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ غَواشٍ وَ كَذٰلِكَ نَجْزِي
الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾ وَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ لا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْساً إِلاَّ وُسْعَها
أُولٰئِكَ أَصْحابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيها خالِدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَ نَزَعْنا ما فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غِلٍّ
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهارُ وَ قالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدانا لِهذا وَ ما كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ
لَوْ لا أَنْ هَدانَا اللَّهُ لَقَدْ جاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنا بِالْحَقِّ وَ نُودُوا أَنْ تِلْكُمُ الْجَنَّةُ
أُورِثْتُمُوها بِما كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَ نادى أَصْحابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحابَ النَّارِ أَنْ قَدْ
وَجَدْنا ما وَعَدَنا رَبُّنا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُمْ ما وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا قالُوا نَعَمْ فَأَذَّنَ
مُؤَذِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَ
يَبْغُونَها عِوَجاً وَ هُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ كافِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَ بَيْنَهُما حِجابٌ وَ عَلَى الْأَعْرافِ
رِجالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلاًّ بِسِيماهُمْ وَ نادَوْا أَصْحابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَمْ

يَدْخُلُوها وَ هُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَ إِذا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصارُهُمْ تِلْقاءَ أَصْحابِ النَّارِ قالُوا
رَبَّنا لا تَجْعَلْنا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَ نادى أَصْحابُ الْأَعْرافِ رِجالاً
يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيماهُمْ قالُوا ما أَغْنى عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَ ما كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾
أَ هؤُلاءِ الَّذِينَ أَقْسَمْتُمْ لا يَنالُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ لا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ
لا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾ وَ نادى أَصْحابُ النَّارِ أَصْحابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ أَفِيضُوا عَلَيْنا مِنَ
الْماءِ أَوْ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَهُما عَلَى الْكافِرِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا
دِينَهُمْ لَهْواً وَ لَعِباً وَ غَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَياةُ الدُّنْيا فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْساهُمْ كَما نَسُوا لِقاءَ يَوْمِهِمْ
هذا وَ ما كانُوا بِآياتِنا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ وَ لَقَدْ جِئْناهُمْ بِكِتابٍ فَصَّلْناهُ عَلى عِلْمٍ
هُدىً وَ رَحْمَةً لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلاَّ تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلُهُ يَقُولُ
الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنا بِالْحَقِّ فَهَلْ لَنا مِنْ شُفَعاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا
لَنا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلَ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَ ضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ ما
كانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(7:37) *So who is a greater wrongdoer than him who fabricates a lie against Allah, or denies His signs? For those, their share shall reach them as decreed in the Book. When Our messengers come to take them away, they will say, "Where is that which you used to invoke besides Allah?" They will say, "They have forsaken us," and they will testify against themselves that they were faithless.*

(7:38) *He will say, "Enter, along with the nations who passed before you of jinn and humans, into the Fire!" Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse its sister [nation]. When they all rejoin in it, the last of them will say to the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire." He will say, "It is double for each [of you], but you do not know."*

(7:39) *And the first of them will say to the last of them, "You have no advantage over us! So taste the punishment because of what you used to earn."*

(7:40) *Indeed, those who deny Our signs and are disdainful of them—the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them, nor shall they enter paradise until the camel passes through the needle's eye, and thus do We requite the guilty.*

(7:41) *They shall have hell for their resting place, and over them shall be sheets [of fire], and thus do We requite the wrongdoers.*

(7:42) *As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds—We task no soul except according to its capacity—they shall be the inhabitants of paradise, and they shall remain in it [forever].*

(7:43) *We will remove whatever rancor there is in their breasts, and streams will run under them. They will say, "All praise belongs to Allah, who guided us to this. We would have never been guided had not Allah guided us. Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth." And the call will be made to them: "This is your paradise, which you have been given to inherit because of what you used to do!"*

(7:44) *The inhabitants of paradise will call out to the inmates of the Fire, "We found what our Lord promised us to be true; did you find what your Lord promised to be true?" "Yes," they will say. Then a caller will announce in their midst, "May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers!"*

(7:45) *Those who bar [others] from the way of Allah, and seek to make it crooked, and disbelieve in the hereafter.*

(7:46) *And there will be a veil between them. And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark. They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!" They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so.*

(7:47) *And when their look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say, "Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!"*

(7:48) *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks, "Your amassing did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain.*

(7:49) *Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will not extend them any mercy?" "Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve."*

(7:50) *The inmates of the Fire will call out to the inhabitants of*

paradise, "Pour on us some water, or something of what Allah has provided you." They will say, "Allah has indeed forbidden these two to the faithless!"

(7:51) *Those who took their religion for diversion and play and whom the life of the world had deceived. So today We will forget them as they forgot the encounter of this day of theirs, and as they used to impugn Our signs.*

(7:52) *Certainly We have brought them a Book, which We have elaborated with knowledge, as a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith.*

(7:53) *Do they await anything but its fulfillment? The day when its fulfillment comes, those who had forgotten it before will say, "Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth. If only we had some intercessors to intercede for us, or we would be returned, so that we may do differently from what we did!" They have certainly ruined their souls, and what they used to fabricate has forsaken them.*

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Introduction

The first verse in this set builds on the last universal address in the previous set of verses, which began with: *O Children of Adam* (7:35). In this sense it is similar to verses in the previous set which were addressed to all humanity. Then the following verses discuss the grave consequences of ascribing lies to God and denying His communications, as well as the eternal bliss awaiting those who believe in God and do righteous deeds. The last two verses talk about God's revelation of a scripture in order to leave no excuse for His servants. Thus they refer back to the beginning of the chapter.

Commentary

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِباً أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآياتِهِ أُولئِكَ يَنالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُمْ مِنَ الْكِتابِ حَتَّى إِذا جاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنا يَتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قالُوا أَيْنَ ما كُنْتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَ شَهِدُوا عَلى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كانُوا كافِرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(7:37) ***So who*** **(fa-man)** ***is a greater wrongdoer than him who fabricates***

a lie against Allah, or denies His signs? For those, their share shall reach them as decreed in the Book. When Our messengers come to take them away, they will say, "Where is that which you used to invoke besides Allah?" They will say, "They have forsaken us," and they will testify against themselves that they were faithless.

The letter *fā'* (so, therefore, then) shows that this verse is mentioned as a conclusion and consequence to the previous verses which were about God's universal religion sent to all humankind through His messengers. God has identified His messengers as points of connection between Him and His creatures. The meaning is: "Now that God has conveyed His universal religion to all children of Adam, and has informed them of the reward that He has prepared for those who accept it and the punishment that He has prepared for those who reject it, who is a greater wrongdoer than one who refuses to submit?" This can occur in two ways: (1) either by forging a lie against God, which means falsely ascribing a path as God's religion, and offering it as a substitute for the monotheistic religion brought by God's messengers; (2) or by denying the signs (*āyāt*) which prove God's oneness and His subsequent communications (*āyāt*) which convey His laws.

"Fabricating a lie against God" includes any innovation in religion, whether in beliefs or ritual practices. However, given the context of the verses before, what is meant here is specifically associating partners with God. We can also infer this from the end of the verse: *they will say, "Where is that which you used to invoke besides Allah?"* (7:37).

… For those, their share shall reach them as decreed in the Book. When Our messengers come to take them away, they will say, "Where is that which you used to invoke besides Allah?" They will say, "They have forsaken us," and they will testify against themselves that they were faithless: "The Book" here means the decree which God has prescribed and ordained. It includes all of what God has decreed and measured for one's life in this world, such as one's lifespan, sustenance, health, wealth and children. All aspects of worldly life are included here, as indicated by the next phrase: *When Our messengers come to take them away*. This refers to the time of death, which marks the end of one's life in this world, with all of its aspects and properties.

… their share…as decreed in the Book…: This refers to the specific share of each person out of all that has been written in general terms for

everyone. The verse says that *one's share* reaches the person, while apparently the order is reverse: *we* seem to be the ones who attain our shares. This reverse order of expression shows that the share which God has written and ordained for each person will never miss them, while anything that has not been written for the person will certainly not reach them.

The meaning is: *For those*: meaning anyone *who fabricates a lie against Allah*—through polytheism—*or denies His signs* by rejecting part or all of His religion; *their share shall reach them as decreed in the Book*: where their share includes anything good or bad which has been decreed for them in this life. This continues until *when Our messengers come to take them away*: this refers to the end of their life, when the Angel of Death and his assistants descend upon them to take their lives and pull their souls out of their bodies. Then these angels will ask them, "*Where is that which you used to invoke besides Allah?*" That is, "Where are the partners which you claimed to be God's associates in directing your affairs? Where are your supposed intercessors with Him?" *They will say, "They have forsaken us,*" meaning: "We do not find those traits and qualities [which we supposed they had]." *And they will testify against themselves that they were faithless*: They will witness the fact of the matter at that point—that no one other than God can effect any benefit or harm. They will realize that they mistakenly attributed benefit and harm to their masters.

There was another similar verse to this in Sūrāh al-Anʿām—and other chapters—where we discussed other relevant topics.[1]

قالَ ادْخُلُوا فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَ الْإِنْسِ فِي النَّارِ كُلَّما دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَها حَتَّى إِذَا ادَّارَكُوا فِيها جَمِيعاً قالَتْ أُخْراهُمْ لِأُولاهُمْ رَبَّنا هؤُلاءِ أَضَلُّونا فَآتِهِمْ عَذاباً ضِعْفاً مِنَ النَّارِ قالَ لِكُلٍّ ضِعْفٌ وَ لكِنْ لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(7:38) ***He will say, "Enter, along with the nations who passed before you of jinn and humans, into the Fire!" Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse its sister [nation]. When they all rejoin in it, the last of them will say to the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire." He will say, "It is***

1 That is verse 6:93. See volume 14, 58ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

double for each [of you], but you do not know."

The speaker here is God, not the angels, although the angels are involved as intermediaries in taking people's lives and other tasks. The verse's text suggests that the audience must be a *subgroup* of disbelievers: a later generation before whom there were other jinn and humans who died. However, the verse's address can be effectively extended to *all* disbelievers. The implied meaning is: "All of you—including the predecessors and the successors—should enter the Fire." It is worded otherwise in order to prepare the grounds for the subsequent debate between the two groups. Elsewhere God says: *That is indeed a true account: the contentions of the inmates of the Fire* (38:64).

This verse shows that while Iblīs lives *until the day of the known time* (15:38, 38:81), there are other members of jinn who die sooner than him, before the end of this world. Most members of the jinn have specific individual lifespans [like humans].

… Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse* (laʿanat) *its sister [nation]* (ukhtahā)*…: This is part of their contention in hell. Every group that enters hell will curse those who entered before them. The meaning of curse (*laʿn*) is "to distance someone from mercy"; and *ukht* is synonymous with *mithl* (similar, counterpart, like).

… When they all rejoin* (iddārakū) *in it…: The word *iddārakū* here means *tadārakū*, which means mutual *idrāk* (finding, realizing, perceiving) between the successors and the predecessors. The effective meaning is: "When they are all gathered in the Fire."

… the last of them will say to the first of them…: "The last" and "the first" here may either refer to priority in terms of degree [of misguidance], or temporal order. In terms of degree, "the first" would be the leaders of misguidance and disbelief who were followed by others. They helped their followers in the way of error by misleading them. In terms of time, "the first" would be earlier generations of disbelievers who again facilitated the misguidance of the later generations by opening the gates of error to them and paving the road for them.

… "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double* (ḍiʿfan) *punishment of the Fire." He will say, "It is double for each [of you], but you do not know.": *Ḍiʿf* means "twice, double." For instance, two is *ḍiʿf* of one, and four is *ḍiʿf* of two. It is used in two meanings: (1) the double of anything, like two being the double of one, and four being

the double of two; (2) that which doubles something, which would be a completing pair. In the second sense, each of the two members of a pair is called *ḍiᶜf*, and together they are called *ḍiᶜfān* (in dual form). Therefore this term is like the term *zawj*, which is used both for the couple (who are called one *zawj* together) and for each of the two mates (who are called *zawjān* together). Both meanings are used in the Qur'an. The first meaning is used in the current verse (in singular form). The second meaning is used in the following verse (in dual form): *Give them a double* (ḍiᶜfayn) *punishment* (33:68).

… the last of them will say to the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray…": There is an elegant shift of address here. The verse describes their dispute by saying that some of them will tell others, but then it narrates a prayer that they make to God against their opponent for their wrongdoing.[1] This is a delicate literary technique, which states one side of a correlation in order to indicate the implication between the two.[2] The verse also demonstrates the art of concision by stating one of two conversations, and leaves it to the audience to infer the second one from that. Their conversation can be elaborated as follows: Their successors will tell their predecessors, "You are greater wrongdoers than us because you strayed yourselves and also led us astray. Hence God should punish you twice as our punishment." Then they will turn to their Lord and pray against them: *Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire*. But God will respond: *It is double for each [of you], but you do not know*. Then the first group will respond to their followers: *You have no advantage over us! So taste the punishment because of what you used to earn* (7:39).

The meaning of the verse is: *When they all rejoin in it*: when they all gather in the Fire by the later generations joining the earlier ones, then

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1 This is based on the letter *lām* in *li-ūlāhum* being translated as "to." The letter *lām* is commonly used in Arabic with the verb *qāla* (say) to make the verb transitive. This interpretation is supported by numerous other Qur'anic examples, but especially with the next verse, as well as verses 34:31-33 and 40:47. Another possibility is that letter *lām* in this case means "about." Another Qur'anic example for this would be verse 11:31. The meaning would be: *The last of them will say about the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray…"* (Trans.)

2 In this case, what is mentioned is their imprecation of the other group, and what is implied is the antagonism between the two groups. (Trans.)

they will start disputing with one another. *The last of them* are those who followed the leaders in terms of degree or time [of error], and *the first of them* are their forefathers, predecessors, leaders and chiefs in the previous societies, who paved the road of misguidance for the later generations. *The last of them will say* to *the first of them,* "You were the ones who led us astray by helping us in this way, so you should be punished twice as us." They will request this from their Lord: *"Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire.* They should be punished twice as us because they were themselves misguided, and also helped others go astray." *He will say, "It is double for each [of you]"*: God will tell them that each of the first and last groups shall have twice the punishment. The leaders should be punished twice because: (1) they went astray; and (2) they helped their followers go astray. The followers should also be punished twice because: (1) they went astray; and (2) they supported their leaders in their misguidance by following their path, responding to their call, and multiplying their number by joining them. *"But you do not know"*: one cannot know whether someone is in pain or not by simply looking at their appearance, because pain is ultimately a mental state. It is of the nature of knowledge, perception and consciousness. You see others in the same punishment as yours, surrounded by the same Fire, and thus imagine that they are suffering the same punishment as yours. But this is not the case, for there is no way for you to know and realize the pain that they are suffering. Similarly, they have no access to know the punishment that you are going through. Both of you are suffering twice the punishment, but you are so absorbed in your punishment that you cannot know the condition of the other group.

God's statement [that *"It is double for each [of you], but you do not know"*] carries a sense of wrath and humiliation which applies to both groups: the first and the last. That is why the first group will respond in a similarly mocking way to the last group, as God narrates in the next verse.

وَ قالَتْ أُولاهُمْ لِأُخْراهُمْ فَما كانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنا مِنْ فَضْلٍ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذابَ بِما كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(7:39) ***And the first of them will say to the last of them, "You have no advantage over us! So taste the punishment because of what you used to earn."***

That is: "You have no advantage over us to receive a milder punishment, so taste the punishment for the sins that you acquired in the world."

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا وَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْها لا تُفَتَّحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوابُ السَّماءِ وَ لا يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ حَتَّى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ الْخِياطِ وَ كَذلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(7:40) ***Indeed, those who deny Our signs and are disdainful of them—the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them, nor shall they enter paradise until the camel passes through the needle's eye*** **(samm al-khiyāṭ)**, ***and thus do We requite the guilty.***

Samm means *thaqb* (hole, bore). Its plural is *sumūm*. *Khiyāṭ* and *makhīṭ* mean "needle." This verse explains and justifies what was mentioned in the last two verses.

… the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them…: Since this sentence is not restricted by any qualification, it can have a wide range of applications when viewed by itself. It can refer to their deeds rising and being accepted, their supplications rising and being answered, and their souls ascending to the heaven. However, the next sentence—*nor shall they enter paradise…*—shows that what is meant here is specifically the opening of the gates of heaven in order for them to enter paradise. The Qur'an suggests that paradise is in the heaven, as we can infer from the verse: *And in the sky is your provision and what you are promised* (51:22).

… until the camel passes through the needle's eye…: This is equivalent to making an event conditional on something impossible. It shows that the event will never occur and is meant to disappoint the audience. It is like saying "I shall do it when crows become white and rats lay eggs."[1] Elsewhere God says this more directly: *and they shall not leave the Fire* (2:167). The rest of the verse should be clear.

لَهُمْ مِنْ جَهَنَّمَ مِهادٌ وَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ غَواشٍ وَ كَذلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

(7:41) ***They shall have hell*** **(jahannam)** ***for their resting place*** **(mihād)**, ***and over them shall be sheets*** **(ghawāsh)** ***[of fire], and thus do We requite the wrongdoers.***

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1 In other words, "when pigs fly" or "when hell freezes over." Interested readers are encouraged to compare this verse with Matthew 19:23-24, Mark 10:23-25 and Luke 18:24-25. (Trans.)

Jahannam is one of the names of the fire in the hereafter which hosts God's punishment. Some have said that it is derived from *bi'r jihinnām*, which means "a very deep well."[1] Others have said that it is the Arabicized version of an originally Persian noun. *Mihād* means "a bed that is spread." A baby's cradle is called *mahd*. *Ghawāshī* is the plural of *ghāshiyah*, meaning "something that covers and conceals something."[2] The cover of a saddle is called *ghāshiyat al-sarj*.

They shall have hell for their resting place, and over them shall be sheets [of fire]…: What is meant here is that they are completely enveloped by punishment from under and above. The rest of the verse should be clear.

وَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ لا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْساً إِلاَّ وُسْعَها أُولئِكَ أَصْحابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيها خالِدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(7:42) ***As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds*** **(al-ṣāliḥāt)**—***We task no soul except according to its capacity—they shall be the inhabitants of paradise, and they shall remain in it [forever].***

This verse and the next one add to the previous verses by completing the description of the two groups: disbelievers and believers. The verses also set the stage for what comes next: *The inhabitants of paradise will call out to the inmates of the Fire* (7:44).

The word *al-ṣāliḥāt* is in the plural form, and is preceded by the article *al-*, which shows *istighrāgh* (inclusion, comprehensiveness, coverage). This means that one must perform all righteous deeds without exception in order to qualify for this verse. However, such stringent condition is rarely, if ever, found among the believers. This could dismay the believers. That is why God clarifies that one is obligated only to the extent of one's ability: *We task no soul except according to its capacity*. This qualification serves to lighten the burden on the believers and strengthen their hearts. Hence, one who does good deeds to the extent of one's ability—without being

1 Apparently this refers to the deep narrow valley outside the walls of Jerusalem, where refuse and executed criminals were burnt, called Hinnom (Hebrew) or Gehenna (Greek). (Trans.)

2 The word used in the verse is *ghawāshī*, but the final letter *yā'* is dropped in writing. (Trans.)

overburdened and loaded beyond their capacity—will be among those who are described in this verse. *hey shall be the inhabitants of paradise, and they shall remain in it [forever].*

وَ نَزَعْنا ما فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غِلٍّ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهارُ وَ قالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدانا لِهذا وَ ما كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْ لا أَنْ هَدانَا اللَّهُ لَقَدْ جاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنا بِالْحَقِّ وَ نُودُوا أَنْ تِلْكُمُ الْجَنَّةُ أُورِثْتُمُوها بِما كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(7:43) ***We will remove whatever rancor* (ghill) *there is in their breasts, and streams will run under them. They will say, "All praise belongs to Allah, who guided us to this. We would have never been guided had not Allah guided us. Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth." And the call will be made to them: "This is your paradise, which you have been given to inherit because of what you used to do!"***

Ghill means "rancor, resentment, enmity." Its root meaning involves a sense of subtle and furtive intermediation. *Ghilālah* means a middle garment that is worn between the undergarment (*shiʿār*) and the overgarment (*dithār*). Having rancor in the heart is among the greatest impediments of having an enjoyable life. In our interactions with anyone, we tend to get along and have an amiable relationship with them as long as what we observe from them is compatible with our views and values. But if we observe something unsatisfactory from the person, our hearts will be agitated with rancor, our relationship sours, and our friendship fades away. If God takes rancor away from our hearts, then nothing that we observe from others would disturb us whatsoever, and in that lies the greatest of pleasures.

… and streams will run under them…: This suggests that they will reside in elevated palaces.

… They will say, "All praise belongs to Allah, who guided us to this. We would have never been guided had not Allah guided us. Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth."…: Praising God is not so simple and trivial to be achieved by anyone. Only those who have been chosen by God can describe Him as He deserves. The Qur'an says: *Clear is Allah of whatever they allege [about Him]—[all] except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:159-160). Therefore, narrating their praise (*ḥamd*, *taḥmīd*) of God shows that God has chosen and purified them for Himself, such that

they are free from any false belief or evil action. He says: *They will not hear therein any vain talk or sinful speech, but only the watchword, "Peace! Peace!"* (56:25-26). We discussed the meaning of praise and its divine application in Surah al-Ḥamd.[1]

… We would have never been guided had not Allah guided us…: This sentence shows that one's guidance is entirely in the hands of God, and the person has no control over it.

… Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth…: Here the inhabitants of paradise admit the truth of God's promises conveyed to them through the tongue of His prophets. They ask the inhabitants of hell to acknowledge the same in the next verse. Such confessions that the Almighty God takes from the two groups on the Day of Resurrection are manifestations of His absolute grandeur, invincibility and lordship. The confession of the people of paradise is an expression of gratitude, and the confession of the inhabitants of hell will complete God's argument against them. This idea—that people on the Day of Resurrection will acknowledge that God's promises through His messengers were true—may seem rather trivial at first sight. However, it is among the very sublime Qur'anic teachings. I will try to analyze it further in my exposition of the verses below [7:44-45].

… And the call will be made to them: "This* (tilkum) *is your paradise, which you have been given to inherit because of what you used to do!": The demonstrative pronoun *tilkum* (lit. that) is used for objects at a distance. However, the context shows that this call will be made when they are already in paradise. Therefore, the demonstrative pronoun indicates the significance and elevation of paradise [not its physical distance from them].

The verse describes paradise as their "inheritance" (*irth*) in return for their deeds. Inheritance is used when someone has some property which he uses for a while, then he dies and the property remains for another person to use. Thus it is said, "So-and-so inherited from his father," which means that his father died and left some wealth behind for his child. Similarly, [a hadith says,] "The scholars are the prophet's heirs," meaning that they are heirs to the knowledge left behind by the prophets. "God inherits the earth" [19:40], which means that when people die, the property and benefits which were given to them will remain after them.

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1 See volume 1, pp. 46ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

Given this sense of inheritance, the verse means that paradise has been created and made available to everyone, including both believers and disbelievers, which they may claim through their actions. However, disbelievers waive their claim, miss their chance, and pass away, leaving their *potential* property to be *inherited* by the believers. They inherit paradise by means of their deeds; were it not for their deeds, they would not inherit it. God says [about the believers]: *they shall inherit paradise, and will remain in it [forever]* (23:11). He also narrates from the inhabitants of paradise: *All praise belongs to Allah, Who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish* (39:74).

What we said above is a better explanation than the one offered by al-Rāghib. He says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *Wirāthah* and *irth* mean the transfer of some wealth to you not through a financial contract (called *ʿaqd*). The property which is transferred from the deceased is called *mīrāth*, *irth*, and *turāth*. Its root is *wurāth*, but the letter *wāw* is converted to *alif* [in *irth*] and to *tāʾ* [in *turāth*]. God says: *and you eat the inheritance* (al-turāth) *rapaciously* (89:19).
>
> Similarly the Prophet said: "Stay in your designated areas [in ʿArafāt], for indeed you are on a remainder (*irth*) from your father," meaning that these are rooted in him.[1] A poem says:
>
> فَيَنْظَرُ فِي صُحُفٍ كَالرِّيَا طِ فِيهِنَّ إِرْثُ كِتَابٍ مَحِي
>
> He looks at scrolls that are simple and plain;
> The remainder (*irth*) of a book that is lost they contain.[2]
>
> … The verb *waratha* is also used more generally when one acquires something without any effort. When someone is given something pleasant, this verb is used in the passive form ūritha. Thus God says: *That is the paradise you have been given to inherit* (ūrithtumūhā) (43:72); *It is they who will be the inheritors*

1 In other words, you have inherited the designated areas and rituals of hajj from your father Abraham. (Trans.)

2 The poem is by Abū Dhuʾayb Khuwaylid b. Khālid al-Hudhalī (d. c. 27 AH, 648 CE). (Trans.)

(al-wārithūn), *who shall inherit* (yarithūna) *paradise, and will remain in it [forever]* (23:10-11).

God says [narrating from Zechariah]: *who may inherit from me and inherit* (yarithunī wa yarithu) *from the House of Jacob* (19:6). What he meant was inheriting prophethood, knowledge and virtue, not wealth, because wealth is not of any significance to the prophets to hanker after it. Rather, the prophets rarely ever possessed and accumulated any wealth. This can be seen in the Prophetic narration: "We community of prophets do not bequeath [anything]. Whatever we leave behind is charity," which is mentioned as a special honor and quality for the prophets. This has been interpreted as follows: "What we leave behind is [religious] knowledge, and that is a charity for the entire Muslim nation (ummah) to partake in."

Likewise, it is narrated from the Prophet that "The scholars [of religion] are the heirs (*warathah*) of the prophets," which refers to their inheritance of [religious] knowledge. The word *warathah* (heirs, inheritors, successors) is used here because the knowledge that the scholars get from the prophets does not come at any cost or *minnah* (obligation, reproach).

The Prophet told ʿAlī, "You are my brother and heir (*wārith*)." ʿAlī inquired, "And what is your inheritance (*irth*)?" He explained, "The same as the inheritance of the prophets before me: the Book of God and my sunnah."

God describes Himself as a heir [to the earth and all its resources] in the sense that all things return to God.

Our explanation is clearer than al-Rāghib's because it is difficult to find a common denominator as a root meaning for the definitions that he has suggested.

وَ نادى أَصْحابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحابَ النَّارِ أَنْ قَدْ وَجَدْنا ما وَعَدَنا رَبُّنا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُمْ ما وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا قالُوا نَعَمْ فَأَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(7:44) ***The inhabitants of paradise will call out to the inmates of the Fire, "We found what our Lord promised us to be true; did you find what***

your Lord promised to be true?" "Yes," they will say. Then a caller will announce in their midst, "May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers!"

Here God takes confession from the inmates of hell through the inhabitants of paradise. The dialogue here is a rebuke and humiliation of the inmates of hell by the inhabitants of paradise. Derision is an example of vain speech if there is no justification behind it, such as mocking the truth and its followers. However, sometimes there is a justifiable cause behind deriding someone, such as rightful retaliation, retribution or some other consideration. In such cases, derision is not a vain act, so it can ensue from the inhabitants of paradise. God says in the story of Prophet Noah: *As he was building the ark, whenever the elders of his people passed by him, they would ridicule him. He said, "If you ridicule us [today], we shall ridicule you [tomorrow] just as you ridicule us [now]"* (11:38). He also says: *Indeed the guilty used to laugh at the faithful, and when they passed them by they would wink at each other… So today the faithful will laugh at the faithless* (83:30-34).

There is a subtle difference of expression in the verse, where the inhabitants of paradise mention the recipients of God's promise when the talk about themselves—*what our Lord promised us*—but they do not mention it when they talk about the inmates of the Fire: *what your Lord promised*. There are two possible explanations for this difference of expression:

(1) It shows an honor for the inhabitants of paradise [for being recipients of God's promise]. Otherwise, "what God promised" in both cases includes all of God's promises of reward and threats of punishment, addressed to everyone in the world.

(2) What the believers acknowledge and what the disbelievers deny are not the same thing. The believers believe in the truth of Resurrection along with all of its aspects and properties, as God has promised to them and described through the tongue of His prophets. The denial of the disbelievers, however, only applies to the truth of afterlife. They do not believe in there being any resurrection or retribution, which are among the *general* promises of God to *everyone*, not something *specific to them*. God's argument against the disbelievers is about the actual occurrence of the Resurrection, not its specific qualities and details, as He says: *Were you to see when they are stationed before their Lord. He will say, "Is this not a fact?" They will say, "Yes, by our Lord!"* (6:30); *The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, [He will say,] "Is this not a fact?" They will say, "Yes,*

by our Lord!" (46:34). In other words, what the disbelievers primarily confront in this world is God's general promise of resurrection, which applies to everyone. The believers accept that and open up to God's promises of rewards that specifically apply to them.[1] That is why the believers say: *We found what our Lord promised us to be true; did you find what your Lord promised to be true?*

Some exegetes have raised concern about an apparent inconsistency in this verse: The question narrated here from the inhabitants of paradise shows that they expect God's warning and threats of punishment to materialize in the hereafter. However, whereas it is incumbent on one to fulfill one's promise [of reward], it is not incumbent on one to fulfill one's threat [of punishment], as discussed in theology. So it is *not* necessary for God to fulfill His promise of punishing the disbelievers and sinners.

The theological principle stated here is based on the concept of "right." In the case of reward, the doer of a good act is entitled to reward as a right, and he cannot be denied his due right. In the case of punishment, the possessor of the right is the other side [either God or one who has been wronged], who is entitled to waive his right to punish. In other words, one can waive one's own right, but cannot overlook a right that belongs to another person.

Our explanation above should solve this problem. The above theological principle is true, but not applicable to this verse. The fact that one [that is, God] can waive the right to punish a wrongdoer is true in individual cases. However, we cannot generalize it to include the execution of punishment for sin altogether, because that would destroy the whole foundation of penalizing wrongdoers. That would make all religious injunctions pointless, which amounts to disorder in the entire system of creation.

Concerning the difference of expression in this verse, some exegetes have said that *what our Lord promised us* refers to the special treatment of the Godwary that God has particularly promised them, but *what your Lord promised* refers to God's promises to everyone, including the reward promised to the believers and the punishment promised to the disbelievers. Hence, the second promise would include what is stated in these

1 In other words, the difference is that of elaboration and brevity. The believers consider the detailed rewards and punishments of God in the hereafter, and believe in them all. The disbelievers do not bother looking inside the box, but reject it outright by denying afterlife altogether. (Trans.)

verses: *Then, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it [forever]* (2:38-39). These promises are not specific to the disbelievers, so instead of saying "what your Lord promised *to you*" the verse says: *what your Lord promised*.

Comment: The problem with this explanation is that it does not fully answer the question, because the inquirer would then move on to ask, "Why is it that when the inhabitants of paradise speak about God's promises to themselves, they only mention what specifically applies to them, but then they ask the inmates of hell about all of God's promises? In other words, amongst God's promises, some of them are specific promises which apply to only one of the two groups, and some of them are general promises which apply to everyone. How come the inhabitants of paradise acknowledge the promises especially given to them, but ask the inmates of hell to acknowledge the general promises?"

Other exegetes have said that the inmates of hell will see the reward given to the inhabitants of paradise. That is why they are asked about *what your Lord promised*.

Comment: This is such a weak explanation[1] that is not worthy of discussion.[2]

… Then a caller will announce in their midst, "May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers!": The letter *fā'* (then, so, therefore) at the beginning of this part indicates temporal sequence. That is, once the inhabitants of paradise and hell acknowledge God's promises to be true, this announcement will be made. The verse says: *in their midst*, which means that this announcement—*May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers*—is declared to both groups. The announcement indicates God's decree that the wrongdoers shall be far

1 The reason for its weakness is that there is no evidence from the text or context to support it. It is purely a conjecture. (Trans.)

2 There is a rule in Arabic grammar which states, "It is permissible to omit that which is understood." The difference of expression in this verse can be a clear application of this rule, without requiring any of the above contrived explanations. In other words, the inclusion of the pronoun in the first part implies its equivalent inclusion in the second part. The meaning would be: "We found what our Lord promised us to be true; did you find what your Lord promised *you* to be true?" (Trans.)

and distanced from His mercy. The cursed wrongdoers are then described in the next verse.

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَ يَبْغُونَها عِوَجاً وَ هُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ كافِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(7:45) ***Those who bar [others] from the way of Allah, and seek to make it crooked, and disbelieve in the hereafter.***

These are those who deny the hereafter and prevent others from pursuing God's way. They are themselves deviant from the straight path, and also present it as devious to others. In short, they are against the Truth [that is, God] and reject the hereafter.

The description in this verse is not limited to those who believe in some god and follow some religious tradition. Rather, it applies to all those who are against the Truth and deny retribution [in the hereafter], including atheists and those who do not believe in any religion whatsoever. This inclusion is because *the way of Allah*—meaning the path which leads to Him and ends in Him—is the path of humanity, meaning a path that is according to the innate nature of humankind, a path that they intuitively incline toward based on their makeup as a species (called *fiṭrah*). This is what the Qur'an advocates: to adopt this path as one's religion; to have submission (*islām*) before one's divine conscience and intuition (*fiṭrah*).

The path that is pursued by anyone in this life is God's way and religion. The difference is in *how* one pursues this path. If one treads it path in an upright fashion, as called for by one's *fiṭrah*, then the path will lead the person to happiness. This is what makes one's way the straight path, which is free from deviation. This is the meaning of submission (*islām*), which is the only accepted religion by God [3:19]. However, there are those who go through the path of life in other manners: some admit and worship other gods, as in the case of false religions and traditions; others do not recognize any form of worship and deity whatsoever, as in the case of pure materialism. Either way, this amounts to an attempt to make God's way crooked. That would be a distorted submission [directed to where it does not belong]. This is the meaning of converting God's blessing to ingratitude [14:28]. The reader should reflect on this.

The verse says vaguely, *Then a caller will announce in their midst* (7:44), without specifying who the caller is. Is it a human, a jinn, or an angel? Through reflection on the Qur'an, we can assert that the caller will be a human, not a jinn, nor an angel. It will not be of the jinn because the

Qur'an never mentions the jinn among the intermediaries in the affairs of humans from when they enter the hereafter—which is the time of their death—until their final settlement in either paradise or hell. Hence, it is improbable that the caller may be of the jinn.

As with the angels, we must admit that God's decrees are fulfilled through their intermediation. They are among the means and instruments of executing God's will and commands. They are also involved with humans when they die. For instance, they address the wrongdoers upon their death: *Give up your souls* (6:93). They also welcome and greet the inhabitants of paradise: *Peace be to you! Enter paradise* (16:32). Similarly, the angel Mālik tells the inmates of hell: *Indeed you will stay on* (43:77). There are other verses similar to these. However, they are not involved in the plain of resurrection (*maḥshar*), which is where the questioning, testimony, records, scales, and reckoning will take place. That is where the final judgment [of God concerning the people] will be made. The Qur'an does not explicitly talk about any role played by the angels or any other being at that stage.

The only thing that is *explicitly* mentioned at that level is the involvement of humans. One example is seen below, concerning the occupants of the Elevations: *They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!"* (7:46). They will also address a group of believers: *Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve* (7:49), where they issue a command and give assurance to the believers by God's leave. Similarly, God says concerning the Day of Resurrection: *Those who were given knowledge will say, "Indeed today disgrace and distress pursue the faithless"* (16:27). Another similar verse is about those who will respond to the people's question in the hereafter about how long they stayed in the earth: *Those who were given knowledge and faith will say, "Certainly you remained in Allah's Book until the Day of Resurrection. This is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know"* (30:56). These are some of the tasks on the Day of Resurrection for which God has chosen humans instead of angels, in addition to their position of testimony and intercession. All of these verses strengthen the possibility that the caller mentioned here will be a human, not an angel. We shall come back to this in our examination of the narrations below.

وَ بَيْنَهُما حِجابٌ وَ عَلَى الْأَعْرافِ رِجالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلاًّ بِسِيماهُمْ وَ نادَوْا أَصْحابَ

الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَمْ يَدْخُلُوها وَ هُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(7:46) ***And there will be a veil*** **(ḥijāb)** ***between them. And on the Elevations*** **(al-aʿrāf)** ***will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark*** **(sīmāhum).** ***They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!" They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so.***

The meaning of *ḥijāb* is well known (veil, barrier, curtain). It means "a cover that interposes between two things and conceals one from the other." *Aʿrāf* refers to the upper [visible] part of the *ḥijāb* and sandy hills. The highest part of anything is called *ʿurf*, such as the comb of a rooster and the crest of a horse. Overall there is an element of elevation and height in this root. Since the verse first talks about the *ḥijāb* and then the *aʿrāf*, we can deduce that *aʿrāf* refers to the higher parts of the barrier which divides paradise and hell. It is an elevated position where one can oversee both the inhabitants of paradise and the inmates of hell. This is confirmed by what is mentioned next, where those on the *aʿrāf* address both groups.

Sīmāʾ is synonymous with *ʿalāmah* (mark, sign, expression). Al-Rāghib says:

> *Sīmāʾ* and *sīmiyāʾ* both mean *ʿalāmah*. A poet says: "He has a *sīmiyāʾ* which is not hard to see." God says: *Their mark* (sīmāhum) *is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration* (48:29). When one marks someone or something, he says: *sawwamtuhu*. What is marked is called *musawwam*.

Upon contemplation on this verse and the following verses, it becomes clear that the dual pronoun "them"—in *And there will be a veil between them*—refers to the inhabitants of paradise and the inhabitants of hell. A similar idea to this is mentioned in the dialogue between the hypocrites and the believers on the Day of Resurrection: *The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful, "Please let up on us, that we may glean something from your light!" They will be told: "Go back and grope for light!" Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior* (57:13).

The word *ḥijāb* is used in a rather literal sense here: something that blocks and obstructs (*yaḥjubu*). It refers to a barrier that separates the two groups from one another, and prevents one from seeing the other. It does not mean a veil or curtain (*ḥijāb*) made of fabric, suspending between

paradise and hell. God then says that on the heights of this barrier there will be some men who oversee both groups due to their elevated position. They will recognize everyone among the inhabitants of paradise and hell by their specific mark.

The context shows that these men on the Elevations neither belong to the inhabitants of paradise nor to the inmates of hell. Now what does that mean? There are three possibilities here:

(1) They are not humans, but are other beings like angels or jinn.

(2) They are humans, but they will not be among the masses who will be subject to questioning, reckoning, and the other stages on that day. This means that people will be divided into three groups on the Day of Judgment: (i) the inhabitants of paradise; (ii) the inmates of hell; (iii) the occupants of the Elevations. This would match the state of people in this world, where they divide into three categories: (i) believers; (ii) disbelievers; (iii) disadvantaged individuals (*mustaḍʿafūn*). The last group includes those who do not receive divine guidance in a conclusive way, as well as those who are exempt from religious obligations due to their weakness of intellect, such as insane or feeble-minded individuals, immature children, old people who have lost their senses, and fools.

3) They are humans, much like the last case, but what distinguishes the third group from the masses is their high status [not their disadvantage].

The People on the *Aʿrāf*

The word "men" in this verse is significant in two ways: (i) Syntactically, it is mentioned in an indefinite form (*nakirah*), which conveys aggrandizement and emphasis on their position. (ii) Semantically, "man" (*rajul*) is usually used to indicate a person who has a strong will power and a solid rational faculty. This is how the term is used elsewhere in the Qur'an, such as: *by men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah* (24:37); *Therein are men who love to keep pure* (9:108); *Among the faithful are men who fulfill what they have pledged to Allah* (33:23); *We did not send [any messengers] before you except as men to whom We revealed* (12:109). Here we can even quote verses like: *And they [the inmates of hell] will say, "How come we do not see [here] men whom we used to count among the bad ones?"* (38:62); *Indeed some persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn* (72:6). What is meant by "men" in this verse is individuals who have achieved

perfection in their humanity. The word "men" in verses like this can also include women based on generalization (*taghlīb*).[1]

Therefore, the last of the three possibilities above is the correct view. Here is why the other two possibilities are not plausible:

They cannot be angels because the verse calls them "men" (*rijāl*). Angels are never described as male or female, unlike animals. One might say, "Perhaps they are angels who manifest in the *form* of men." The answer is that such appearance is not sufficient for labelling and describing them as "men"—not to mention that there is no evidence to prove such appearance of angels on that day.

They cannot be the disadvantaged individuals (*mustaḍᶜafūn*) because there is nothing special about them to be mentioned with particular attention to their position.[2] The disadvantaged are not limited to men, but include a variety of individuals such as women, children, and even some jinn. None of them, including their men, has any advantage over others. Therefore, there is no justification for calling them "men" based on generalization (*taghlīb*). If what is meant here were the disadvantaged individuals, then the verse should have used another term like *qawm* (people), *unās* (lot) or *ṭāʾifah* (group),[3] as used elsewhere in the Qurʾan in such cases. Some examples are: *Why do you advise a people* (qawman) *whom Allah will destroy or punish with a severe punishment?* (7:164); *They are indeed a puritanical lot* (unās) (7:82); *So a group* (ṭāʾifah) *of the Children of Israel believed, and a group* (ṭāʾifah) *disbelieved* (61:14).

The qualities and descriptions mentioned in the subsequent part of this verse and the next verses confirm our interpretation, because they only make sense about people who have a lofty station at divine proximity. They are not applicable to ordinary individuals, let alone the disadvantaged. Here is what is mentioned about the people of *aᶜrāf*:

(1) They are positioned on the Elevations, where they oversee everyone on the Day of Resurrection, can view the inhabitants of paradise and the

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1 *Taghlīb* is when a mixed group is entirely described by the quality of *some* of them, even though that quality does not apply to *all* of them. (Trans.)

2 This refers to the syntactic significance of the word *rijāl* in this verse, which is mentioned in the indefinite form (*nakirah*). (Trans.)

3 This refers to the semantic significance of the word *rijāl*, which conveys certain positive qualities like physical strength, rational ability, and will power. The other terms are relatively more neutral. (Trans.)

inmates of hell, and will recognize every person with the person's unique mark. They fathom the actions of each person in detail and encompass the specific spiritual qualities of everyone. This indicates their exclusive position among the people, because not everyone will be able to see all people on the Day of Resurrection, particularly after they enter paradise and hell. This is not something that is universally available to everyone, as God narrates from the inmates of hell: *How come we do not see [here] men whom we used to count among the bad ones?* (38:62); *Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray from among jinn and humans so that we may trample them under our feet, so that they may be among the lowermost!* (41:29). He also says: *That day each of them will have a task to keep him preoccupied* (80:37).

It should be noted that what is meant by *who recognize each of them by their mark* is not that they know overall who is a believer and who is a disbeliever according a *general* mark of each party which is visible in their members, such as brightness or darkness of the face. This possibility is refuted by two verses below: *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks, "Your amassing did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain. Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will not extend them any mercy?" "Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve"* (7:48-49). These verses show that they can distinguish the people by their marks as being covetous and contemptuous, which are more specific classifications than the general classifications of belief and disbelief.

(2) They will speak with both groups. They will greet and welcome the inhabitants of paradise [7:46]; and they will censure the inmates of hell based on their actions and speeches [7:48]. They are completely free to make these conversations without any impediment. This shows their high rank, because only an elect few of God's servants will be permitted to speak on the Day of Judgment: those who only speak the truth: *None shall speak except whom the All-Merciful permits and who says what is right* (78:38). This is not something that the disadvantaged would qualify for.

(3) They are in such position to salute the people of paradise—which conveys security for them [7:46]—and issue an unconditional command to them to enter paradise [7:49]. This is apparently their speech [not the speech of God or the angels] given the context of the verses.

(4) The verses bear no indication of anxiety or agitation in the people

of *aʿrāf* where they stand, when they converse with the inhabitants of paradise, and when they address the proud oppressors in hell. There is no sense of disturbance in their speech. Moreover, they are not described as appearing in the scene along with the rest of the people and experiencing the frightening events which will make the hearts vacant [14:43] and turn the mountains into a mirage [78:20]. This means that they are among God's most exclusive servants, as He says: *So they will indeed be arraigned [before Him]—[all] except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:127-128). They are exempt from all horror on the Day of Resurrection.

In the verses below, God narrates a prayer from the people of *aʿrāf*: *And when their look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say, "Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!"* (7:47). He does not decline their request, which shows that: (1) they are permitted to speak; and (2) their supplications will be granted. Otherwise, God would have declined their request, as we see in the case of other requests on that day by the inmates of hell, and by the people upon the Resurrection [to be returned to the world].

The above qualities and their implications are deduced by reflecting on these verses. They should leave no doubt for anyone who contemplates on these verses that what is meant here—by *on the Elevations will be certain men*—is a group of chosen servants of God, not angels. They have a much higher rank and position than the rest of the people on the Day of Resurrection, and will recognize everyone among the two groups [in paradise and hell]. They will have certain rights on that day, including: (1) the right to speak the truth; (2) the right to testify [to the acts of others]; (3) the right to intercede [to save others]; (4) the right to command and decree [the fate of others].

Now, will they be humans, jinn, or a mix of both? We have no textual evidence to answer this question, but we can say that the Qur'an never mentions the jinn as intermediaries in anything that pertains to the judgment of humans on the Day of Resurrection. They are not involved in any human affair like testimony (*shahādah*), intercession (*shafāʿah*) and so on.

The above qualities that we listed about the people of *aʿrāf* do not contravene other verses like: *It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah* (82:19). We should understand this verse in light of other verses. The verse does not mean that God will be in command of the affairs *only* starting from that

day. Rather, that is a day when His absolute command will *appear* to everyone. Otherwise, He is consistently in charge of all affairs at all times, and no soul controls any aspect of another soul ever, not just on the Day of Resurrection. The instruments and intermediaries—such as the angels, the witnesses, and the intercessors—will nevertheless have their role on that day. This is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an: *and the angels will receive them [saying]: "This is your day which you were promised"* (21:103); *and on the day when the witnesses rise up* (40:51); *Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know [for whom to intercede]* (43:86).

The kingdom and the rule on that day will exclusively belong to God, and others may have a role to the extent that He grants them, which is called the divine *idhn* (leave, permission). This is no different than this world, except that on the Day of Resurrection these realities will manifest starkly, without any ambiguity, and will be present to everyone without being missed due to ignorance, inadvertence, mistake or cancellation.

Views of other Exegetes

Exegetes have disagreed greatly on the interpretation of this verse, some of them offering unwarranted views. Here is a list of what they have said concerning *aʿrāf* (the Elevations):

(1) It is something that overhangs both groups.
(2) It is a wall with an edge like a rooster's comb (*ʿurf*).
(3) It is a hill between paradise and hell, where some sinners will sit.
(4) It is the same as the wall which will be raised between the believers and the hypocrites, as the Qur'an says: *Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate* (57:13).
(5) *Aʿrāf* here means *taʿarruf* (recognition, acquaintance). Therefore, "being on the *aʿrāf*" means being in a state of *taʿarruf*—that is, being aware of everyone's condition.
(6) It means the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*).

Exegetes have also varied to a great degree concerning the men who will be on the *aʿrāf* (the Elevations). They have offered up to 12 interpretations:

(1) They are the noblest of people who are selected by God.
(2) They are those whose good deeds and evil deeds match. They neither have more good deeds so that they may enter paradise, nor more evil deeds so that they are sent to hell. Thus God makes

them stand on these Elevations, representing an intermediate position between paradise and hell. Then God will let them enter paradise by His mercy.

(3) They are those who lived in times when there was no divine message (*fatrah*).

(4) They are believers from the jinn.

(5) They are the children of unbelievers who died before reaching puberty.

(6) They are illegitimate children.

(7) They are those who were self-conceited.

(8) They are a group of angels who will stand there [on the Elevations] and who will recognize everyone by their mark. In response to the objection that angels are never called "men" or "women," these exegetes explain that the angels will *embody* and take the *form* of men.

(9) They are the prophets who will be raised there in order to: (i) be distinguished from the rest of the people; and (ii) to testify against the people.

(10) They are the just witnesses from every nation, who will rise there to testify against their people.

(11) They are a group of pious and knowledgeable individuals.

(12) They will be ʿAbbās, Ḥamzah, ʿAlī and Jaʿfar. They will have a special seat next to the Bridge, where they will recognize their lovers based on their bright faces, and their enemies based on their dark faces.

In addition to these twelve views concerning the people of *aʿrāf*, we can add another two here:

(13) They are the disadvantaged individuals (*mustaḍʿafūn*), meaning those who did not receive the message of guidance decisively so that they may be accountable for religious obligations, including men and women who were weak in the earth, and children who did not reach the age of maturity. This view can be integrated with the second view, by saying that the people of *aʿrāf* are those who have neither good deeds which outweighs their evil deeds, nor vice versa, whether this is because of not being obligated by religious duties due to not receiving the message fully, or because of having equal weights of good and evil deeds. The two groups

would be subject to the same rule. The first group would include children, fools, those living in times when there was no divine message (*fatrah*), and the like.

(14) They are those who participated in holy war (jihad) without permission from their fathers, and were martyred in God's way. On the one hand, they should burn in hell because of disobeying their fathers, and on the other hand they deserve paradise because of their martyrdom. There is a narration to this effect. This view can also be integrated with the second interpretation above.

Not all of the above views are mutually exclusive. For instance, the third view—that the people of *aʿrāf* are those who lived at times of *fatrah*—is based on idea that neither their good deeds dominate their evil deeds, nor vice versa. Hence, this interpretation boils down to the second view. Similarly, the sixth view—that they are illegitimate children—is based on the assumption that they are neither believers nor disbelievers. Finally, views 9-12 can be reduced to the first view.

Therefore, we can sum up the views on the people of *aʿrāf* under three main categories:

(i) They are a group of people with a high spiritual rank and position—notwithstanding the difference of opinion about who these noble souls are. Some suggested views that we quoted are: prophets, witnesses to deeds [of others], and religious scholars.

(ii) They are those who have neither good deeds which dominate their evil deeds, nor vice versa. Again, there is controversy in determining their instances and applications.

(iii) They are a group of angels.

Most exegetes have favored the second of these main views, predominantly because of the narrated interpretations. We shall present these narrations in our examination of the narrations below, by God's will. Nevertheless, our explanations above should clarify that the text and context of the verses support the first view. In fact, although some exegetes have inclined toward the second view, they have nevertheless admitted that it does not quite comply with the theme of the verses, such as al-Ālūsī in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*.

The twelfth view above is based on a narration reported by al-Ālūsī in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn ʿAbbās. *Tafsīr al-manār* says about it:

> This is not found in any of the narrational books of exegesis. Apparently he [al-Ālūsī] has reported it from Shia commentaries. The problem with this interpretation is that [according to the verse,] the people of *aʿrāf* will know and distinguish every single one of the inhabitants of paradise and hell by their mark, and will testify about them. So what is the point of having these noble souls on the Bridge, making out those who were hostile toward them from the Umayyads, and especially toward ʿAlī from the hypocrites and the enemies of Ahl al-Bayt (*nawāṣib*)? Besides, the Elevations (*aʿrāf*) and the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) are completely distinct positions. This interpretation is very unlikely given the flow and context of the verse.

Assessing the View of *Tafsīr al-manār*

We have to clarify a few points regarding the above quote from *Tafsīr al-manār*:

(1) The narration is not found in any Shia commentary on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk. However, it is found in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* [Shia commentary], quoting from *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī* [Sunni commentery], via his chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn ʿAbbās. We shall discuss the Shia narrations concerning the people of *aʿrāf* in our examination of the narrations, by God's will.

(2) *Tafsīr al-manār* has rejected the above narration correctly, but not with the right justification. The author's reasoning shows his approach to all eschatological discussions, where he takes things quite literally. That is, he interprets the events mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith about the hereafter by comparing them to the worldly system of affairs. He assumes that the two realms are of the same nature and are governed by the same set of laws. Thus he admits anything that can have a clear justification based on the order of things in this world, and denies anything that does not match invariably. This is rather unwarranted. The reader should reflect on this.

(3) His argument is that the distinction made [between believers and disbelievers] by the people of *aʿrāf* suffices us of any distinction to be made by the people of *ṣirāṭ* (supervisors at the Bridge). However, this is a self-denying argument, because then the very existence of the Bridge would make us needless of the distinction made by the people of *aʿrāf*. Not

only that, but it will also make many other aspects of judgment pointless, such as questioning, reckoning, opening the books, setting up the scales, summoning the deeds, bringing witnesses, and making one's body parts speak. Some of these stages would suffice of others. Not to mention that the Lord of the worlds stands behind all this, and His knowledge suffices of everything, while *He is not questioned concerning what He does* (21:23).[1]

Apparently the author of *al-Manār* has assumed the *aʿrāf* and the *ṣirāṭ* in the hereafter to be like a wall and a bridge in this world: one cannot be standing on the wall and at the same time be right next to the bridge. The two are completely different things in this world. That is why he says, "The Elevations (*aʿrāf*) and the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) are completely distinct positions." This suffers from a fallacy of comparing the hereafter with this world, as we explained above.

(4) Overall, the apparent meaning suggested by the narrations is that the *ṣirāṭ* will be a Bridge that passes over hell to heaven. Everyone will enter the Bridge, then God will save the believers [to paradise] while the wrongdoers will fall into the fire. Now, what is wrong with having the *ḥijāb* (veil, barrier) set up above the Bridge, and the *aʿrāf* being the highest part of that?! In fact, one of the interpretations of *aʿrāf* is *ṣirāṭ*. This is narrated from Ibn Masʿūd by al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr*. It is also narrated from Ibn Jarīj [Jurayḥ]: "They [some exegetes] have supposed that it is the Bridge."[2]

(5) "This interpretation is very unlikely given the flow and context of the verse." The problem with this statement should be clearer than his previous statements [about the Bridge]. The text and context of these verses inform us of unseen facts in general and unspecified terms. We can understand their overall meaning, but their reality is unknown to us, except inasmuch as what God has explained in the Qur'an, where some verses may clarify other verses. The general and unrestricted descriptions given in these verses can certainly be matched with some *specific* individuals who have the attributes mentioned in the verses. It is also possible that these general descriptions coincide with what is mentioned elsewhere in different terms, much like the case of justice and scale.[3]

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1 In other words, He does not need to set up any evidence to prove His judgment to be just, for *He is not questioned concerning what He does*. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

3 There are narrations which interpret scale (*mīzān*) as justice (ʿ*adl*), such as hadith number 8 in "**Examining Narrations**" for verses 1-9 above. What the

… They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!" They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so: The callers here are the men who will be on the Elevations. The Arabic particle *an* (that) shows that *"Peace be to you!"* is interpretive of their call.[1] The last two sentences—*They will not have entered it* and *though they would be eager to do so*—specify the condition of the inhabitants of paradise (that is, they function as a *ḥāl*). The meaning is: "The inhabitants of paradise will receive this greeting *while* they have not yet entered paradise, but they are hopeful to enter it." Another possible meaning is: "The inhabitants of paradise did not enter it *while* they had any hopes of it." According to this interpretation, they receive the greeting after entering the paradise, but the last phrase clarifies that they were not optimistic of entering paradise prior to that—because of the tremendous fears that they observed in the plain of resurrection and upon reckoning. This means that the last sentence is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for the sentence before it, while that is in turn a *ḥāl* for the inhabitants of paradise. However, there is some evidence in the subsequent verses—*Are these the ones concerning whom…* (7:49)—that this greeting is made *before* the inhabitants of paradise actually enter paradise, which confirms the first meaning.

Exegetes have offered two other interpretations for the last two sentences in the verse, which are unlikely:

(1) The last two sentences qualify the condition of the callers in *They will call out* (that is, the last two sentences serve as a *ḥāl* for the pronoun implied by the verb *nādaw*).

Comment: The meaning would then be: "Those men who are on the heights of the barrier between paradise and hell will call out *while* they have not entered paradise yet." This is rather meaningless and thus unacceptable.

(2) The last two sentences do not qualify "the callers" (implied in the previous part of the verse: *They will call out*) but they are a description

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author means here is that it is possible to have a similar match between the Elevations (*aʿrāf*) and the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*). They could be different expressions that point to the same reality. (Trans.)

1 This sentence is rather a technical point regarding the Arabic text of the verse. The Arabic particle *an* is not translated in the English translation of the verse. A more literal translation is: *They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise that* (an) *"Peace be to you!"* (Trans.)

(*bayān*) for the people of *aʿrāf* (mentioned at the beginning of the verse: *And on the Elevations will be certain men*). The meaning would be: "And on the Elevations will be men who have not yet entered paradise, but are eager to do so. They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, *'Peace be to you!' And when their look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say, 'Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot.'*" This is narrated from al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*.

Comment: This means that the last two sentences are either complete statements that are independent from previous part of the verse [about the people of *aʿrāf* greeting the inhabitants of paradise], or adjectives for the people of *aʿrāf*. However, it is unlikely that they are independent statements because then the verse should not have used a pronoun in: *They will not have entered it*. Instead, it should have explicitly mentioned the subject to avoid confusion, just as we see below: *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men…* (7:48). Similarly, it is unlikely that they are adjectives, because that would entail an unnecessary gap—that is, *They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!"*—between the noun and its adjectives.[1]

Based on the second suggested interpretation here, the verse is effectively saying: "On the Elevations there will be certain men who long for entering paradise and seek refuge [with God] from entering hell." It is based on this interpretation that the exegetes have supposed that the people of *aʿrāf* are those whose good deeds are equal to their sins. They end up on the Elevations between paradise and hell because their deeds do not qualify them for either. However, as we explained above, the last two sentences in this verse describe the condition (*ḥāl*) of the people of paradise, not the condition of the people of *aʿrāf*. Similarly, the next verse—*And when their look is turned…* (7:47)—is not about the people of *aʿrāf* either, as we shall explain below.

وَ إِذا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصارُهُمْ تِلْقاءَ أَصْحابِ النَّارِ قالُوا رَبَّنا لا تَجْعَلْنا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

1 In short, the last part of the verse cannot refer to *on the Elevations will be certain men*, but refers to *the inhabitants of paradise*. This is according to a logical linguistic rule that a pronoun generally refers to the most immediate noun before it (as long as the two are commensurate in terms of number, gender and so on). (Trans.)

(7:47) ***And when their look is turned toward*** **(tilqāʾ)** ***the inmates of the Fire, they will say, "Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!"***

Tilqāʾ is originally a verbal noun (meeting, encounter), derived from the root *laqiya yalqá* (to meet, to encounter, to visit), but later it was used as "the *direction* of meeting" (*jihat al-liqāʾ*). The verse does not say that they will voluntarily and willingly look at the inmates of the Fire, but says that their looks are turned in that direction. Perhaps the reason for this expression is that one does not like to look at a painful scene, especially the most excruciating punishment and misfortunate condition that the inmates of hell suffer. It is rather unbearable to look at such a scene. Nevertheless, sometimes one's glance may cast upon the scene, particularly in a state of anxiety and worry. It is as if someone else has turned the person in that direction; otherwise one would have no interest in looking at that scene or even turning in that direction. That is why the verse says, *And when their look is turned toward…*, instead of saying "when they look at the inmates of the Fire" or another similar expression.

Here is how most exegetes have interpreted the verse: The plural pronouns in "their look" (*abṣāruhum*) and "they will say" (*qālū*) refer to the word "men" in the last verse. The meaning is: "When the people of *aʿrāf* look accidentally at the people of hell, they seek refuge with God from counting them among the inmates of the Fire and casting them into hell. Thus they will pray: *Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!*"

Assuming this interpretation, their supplication here does not reduce their lofty rank in any way. It does not mean that they are relegated to a lower position such that they are now fearful of their end and afraid of entering hell, because the same supplications is narrated from God's resolute messengers [46:35], His noble prophets, His righteous servants, and His most intimate angels. Therefore, there is no hint of diminution of their rank or confusion about their status in this supplication. Nevertheless, the statement at the end of the last verse—*though they would be eager to do so* (7:46)—shows their hope and desire to enter paradise. All this is based on the assumption that the plural pronouns here refer to the people of *aʿrāf*, as favored by other exegetes.

However, the readers should know that the above interpretation is not concordant with the beginning of the next verse: *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out* (7:48). The exegetes have assumed that all of these four verses [7:46-49] are about the people of *aʿrāf*, where they are

described as: *men who recognize each of them… They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise… They will not have entered it… And when their look is turned* (7:46-47). If everything so far were about the occupants of the Elevations, then there was no need to mention them by name in the next verse. Instead, the verse should have referred to them using a plural pronoun, just like the previous verses: "And they will call out to certain men whom they recognize…" Using a pronoun would not involve any ambiguity, and there is no other point to favor the use of a noun instead of a pronoun. However, the verse explicitly names them: *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out* (7:48).

This shows that the two pronouns in the current verse of discussion—that is, "their look" (*abṣāruhum*) and "they will say" (*qālū*)—refer to the inhabitants of paradise. This verse narrates their prayer to God when their looks fall upon the inmates of hell. Similarly, the ending of the last verse [7:46] describes their hope and desire for entering paradise. All these pertain to their state before they actually enter paradise.

وَ نادى أَصْحابُ الْأَعْرافِ رِجالاً يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيماهُمْ قالُوا ما أَغْنى عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَ ما كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(7:48) ***And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks, "Your amassing did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain."***

As we explained above [under verse 7:46], the phrase *whom they recognize by their marks* means that they have marks that not only indicate their final destination as hell, but also indicate other more specific and personal traits of them.

… Your amassing did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain: This is a statement of rebuke and blame. It also shows that they are severed from their worldly connections and means of support. They used to disdain the truth, look down upon it, and be proud of their number [or their financial savings].

أَ هؤُلاءِ الَّذِينَ أَقْسَمْتُمْ لا يَنالُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ لا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ لا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(7:49) ***"Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will***

not extend them any mercy?" "Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve."

This verse refers to the inhabitants of paradise. The word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used in a context of negation, where its indefinite form means "no mercy whatsoever." It negates all mercy as a genus (*jins*). The wrongdoers used to claim that the believers have no share of mercy whatsoever. The question here is a rhetorical one, which reduces to a declarative statement: "These are the one whom you so confidently swore that they will not receive any good—meaning any mercy from God—in their way of servitude [to God]."

… "Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve": This is a command made by the people of *aʿrāf*. They order the believers to enter paradise after describing their condition through a rhetorical question in the first part of the verse. This is what we can say based on the theme and context of the verses. Some exegetes have said:

> There is an implied verb *qīla* (they are told) which is omitted here. The implied meaning is: "They are told on behalf of the All-Merciful: Enter paradise, where you shall have no fear of any future misfortune, nor shall you grieve anything that troubles you in the present."
>
> The verb *qāla* (to say, to tell) is often omitted in the Qur'an and in pure Arabic, as long as there is some sign in the speech to indicate it.[1]

This is incompatible with the flow and context of the verse. There is no sign here to indicate such omission in any way, as we explained before. We can assume the verb *qāla* to be implied if that is what springs to the mind when reading a certain text, but this does not mean that we can assume it in any text that we want. Is there any textual or contextual evidence to support such omission in this verse?

The meaning of *Aʿrāf* (Elevations) in the Qur'an

The term *aʿrāf* is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an besides the four verses in this chapter: 7:46-49. Based on our elaborate discussion of the verses above, we can conclude that *aʿrāf* refers to one of the lofty

1 For some Qur'anic examples see verses 3:106, 8:50, 9:35, 40:46, 43:68-73, 51:14, 54:37, 54:48, 78:30. The omission of *qīla* can be clearly deduced by comparing verses 22:22 and 32:20. (Trans.)

spiritual ranks of humans which will manifest on the Day of Resurrection. God has illustrated it for us by painting the following picture: There shall be a barrier that separates the abode of reward from the abode of punishment on that day. A barrier, by definition, belongs to neither this side nor the other, although it is connected to both. This barrier will have a crest, upon which shall be certain men who oversee all people from the beginning to the end of history. They will see every individual in their unique positions, individual ranks and personal levels, all the way from the highest of the high, to the lowest of the low. They will recognize everyone according to their actions and their specific [spiritual] state. They have the right to speak to anyone that they wish, give security to anyone whom they will, and command anyone to enter paradise by God's permission.

This suggests that their position transcends the level of ordinary people, who are subject to either salvation through good deeds, or to damnation through sins. They belong to a more elevated plane than both of these planes. That is why they can command and rule over both groups.

To understand this better, one can compare it to the court of the kings and rulers. There are some people who receive benefits and blessings from the kings and indulge in any pleasure that they want. There are also those who are chained in prisons, where they suffer the most excruciating punishments and are surrounded by misery from every side. These are the two sides of felicity and wretchedness, which are completely distinct from a third position, which belongs to a group of individuals who serve in the court, govern the two groups, and organize their affairs. They are involved with both groups, where they send boons to the felicitous, and administer punishment to the wretched. These individuals are themselves among the felicitous, but at a higher plane than the two groups. They belong to a different category. Then there is yet a higher level of directors above these servants, and they are the closest intermediaries to the king's court, who are also among the felicitous. In other words, there are different degrees of felicity, extending from the absolute and unrestricted, to stages that are qualified by some conditions.

There is no rational impossibility if God—the King of the Day of Retribution [1:4]—classifies the people into three groups: (1) He may extend His mercy upon some people because of their good deeds, may bless them with His mercy, and may admit them to paradise, for He is the Possessor of extensive forgiveness and magnificent grace. (2) He may send

some to His hell and abode of disgrace because of their sins, for He is the Possessor of severe vengeance, force and absolute might. (3) He may give permission to a third group to act as intermediaries between Him and the other two groups. They would carry out His commands and judgments with respect to the two groups, where they decree felicity for the felicitous, and wretchedness for the wretched. He is the One, the Dominant, Whose absolute oneness dominates everything; thus He can exercise His command with respect to anything through any intermediary that He wills. He can announce and implement His decrees of felicity and wretchedness as He wills. He says [on the Day of Resurrection]: *"To whom does the sovereignty belong today?" "To Allah, the One, the All-Paramount!"* (40:16). The reader should reflect on this.

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وَ نادى أَصْحابُ النَّارِ أَصْحابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ أَفِيضُوا عَلَيْنا مِنَ الْماءِ أَوْ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَهُما عَلَى الْكافِرِينَ ۝٥٠

(7:50) ***The inmates of the Fire will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Pour* (afiḍū, from ifāḍah)** ***on us some water, or something of what Allah has provided you." They will say, "Allah has indeed forbidden these two to the faithless!"***

The word *ifāḍah* is derived from *fayḍ*, which means "over-pouring of water from above." God says: *you see their eyes over-pour* (tafīḍu) *with tears* (5:83), which means that "their tears pour down torrentially." The conjunction "or"—in *some water, or something of what Allah has provided you*—shows that the verb "pour" is used for both *water* and *what Allah has provided you*. This means that "pouring" is used here metaphorically. It is meant in a general sense as pouring down blessings, whether liquid or not. One may also say that the real meaning of *ifāḍah* is not "pouring down a liquid," but "conferring abundant blessings." Therefore, its usage for non-liquids would be a real usage, not a figurative expression. Either way, the verse hints at the exalted position of the inhabitants of paradise compared to the inmates of the Fire.[1]

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1 This is inferred from the use of the preposition *ʿalá* (on, upon) in *Pour on us*. (Trans.)

Water is also among *what Allah has provided you*, but it is singled out and mentioned explicitly before the other provisions because that is the first thing that one would request when surrounded by intense heat. The meaning of the verse should be clear.

الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَهْواً وَ لَعِباً وَ غَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَياةُ الدُّنْيا فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْساهُمْ كَما نَسُوا لِقاءَ يَوْمِهِمْ هذا وَ ما كانُوا بِآياتِنا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(7:51) ***Those who took their religion for diversion*** **(lahwan)** ***and play*** **(laʿiban)** ***and whom the life of the world had deceived*** **(gharrat, from ghurūr).** ***So today We will forget them*** **(nansāhum, from nisyān)** ***as they forgot the encounter of this day of theirs, and as they used to impugn*** **(yajḥadūna, from jaḥd)** ***Our signs.***

Lahw is "anything that distracts one from what is more important." *Laʿib* means "an act that is done out of fancy and imagination, not for a real purpose." *Ghurūr* is "pretending to be helpful but intending to harm." *Nisyān* (forgetting, forgetfulness) is the opposite of *dhikr* (remembrance, mindfulness), but it is sometimes used metaphorically when someone ignores and disregards something deliberately, as though it is forgotten. This is how the term is used in this verse. *Jaḥd* means "to negate, to deny, to reject."

This verse explains what is meant by *the faithless* at the end of the last verse. We can infer three interpretations for *kufr* (disbelief, faithlessness, denial) from this verse: (1) It means taking one's religion for diversion and play, and being deceived by the life of this world. (2) It means forgetting the day of encountering God. (3) It means denying the signs [and/or communications] of God. These are all pertinent interpretations for *kufr*, in one way or another.

Those who took their religion for diversion and play…: This sentence shows that everyone has a religion, even those who engage in diversion and play, and spend their entire life in that way. As we said in our exposition of the verse, *Those who bar [others] from the way of Allah, and seek to make it crooked…* (7:45), religion is the path that one treads in this life, and there is no escape from it. God has set out this path according to our pristine nature and divine makeup (*fiṭrah*), and has called us to it [through His prophets]. This is the real religion of humankind which belongs to them [as the verse says *their religion*]. This is the path that people should pursue,

for it leads them to their true purpose, which is a happy [eternal] life.

As long as people follow this path and adhere to it, their religion coincides with the religion that God has prescribed according to their innate human nature. However, if they divert from this path to other occupations which distract them and only lead to material pleasures—which are rather imaginary objectives—then they have taken their religion to be diversion and play, and the life of this world has deceived them with its illusive attractions.

… So today We will forget them as they forgot the encounter of this day of theirs, and as they used to impugn Our signs: This sentence is similar to the verse: *He [God] will say: "So it is. Our signs came to you, but you forgot them, and thus you will be forgotten today"* (20:126). Forgetting God's signs in this verse [20:126] is equivalent to impugning His signs in the current verse; it is a cause for being forsaken by God on the Day of Resurrection. The meaning is: "Today We shall ignore them and not provide what they need to lead a happy life, just as they ignored this day of theirs and did not prepare for it by doing what was incumbent upon them, and because they used to reject Our signs [and/or communications]."

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وَ لَقَدْ جِئْناهُمْ بِكِتابٍ فَصَّلْناهُ عَلى عِلْمٍ هُدىً وَ رَحْمَةً لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(7:52) ***Certainly We have brought them a Book, which We have elaborated with knowledge, as a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith.***

This verse ties back to the beginning of this set of verses: *So who is a greater wrongdoer than him who fabricates a lie against Allah, or denies His signs?* (7:37). The meaning is: "So who is a greater wrongdoer than these people *given that* We have completed Our proof against them and have clarified Our message [of guidance] for them? We have done so by bringing them a Book which We have elaborated for them. We have revealed this Book to them while We have complete knowledge about its revelation."

With knowledge qualifies the verb "bring" in *We have brought them a Book*. This effectively implies an argument for the truth of the Book: "We have brought them a scripture which consists of the truth because its revelation has been according to Our knowledge [which is a hundred percent accurate]. We are fully aware of the content of this Book."[1]

1 This is similar to the idea that *Allah suffices as a witness* (4:79, 4:166, 10:29,

… as a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith: "Guidance" here means "showing the [right] way" (*irāʾat al-ṭarīq*) which is available in the Qur'an for everyone. "Mercy" refers to God's special mercy, which is promised to the believers in particular. It could also be that "guidance" here means "taking one to the goal" (*al-īṣāl ilá al-maṭlūb*), which is an exclusive feature of the Qur'an for the believers.[1] The first sense of guidance is more appropriate here given the verse's theme and context of arguing against he disbelievers.

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلاَّ تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلُهُ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنا بِالْحَقِّ فَهَلْ لَنا مِنْ شُفَعاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلَ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَ ضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ ما كانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(7:53) ***Do they await anything but its fulfillment*** (**taʾwīlihi**)***? The day when its fulfillment comes, those who had forgotten it before will say, "Our Lord's messengers certainly brought the truth. If only we had some intercessors to intercede for us, or we would be returned, so that we may do differently from what we did!" They have certainly ruined their souls, and what they used to fabricate has forsaken them.***

The pronoun "its" in *its fulfillment* refers to the "Book" in the last verse. As we explained under the verse, *It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book…* (3:7), the word *taʾwīl* (fulfillment, underlying reality) in the Qur'an means the *external reality* which supports an imperative or declarative statement, or the *underlying reality* of anything at the surface. The relation between something and its *taʾwīl* is like the relation between the apparent and hidden aspects of something, or the relation between the two sides of a comparison.[2]

Do they await anything but its fulfillment…: Given this Qur'anic definition of *taʾwīl*, what is meant by *its fulfillment* here is the underlying

13:43, 17:96, 48:28). (Trans.)

1 The two meanings differ based on whether the last part of the verse—*for a people who have faith*—pertains to *mercy* alone, or to both *guidance and mercy*. Linguistically, it certainly qualifies *mercy*, while it can also qualify *guidance* if there is contextual evidence for it. The author has favored the former. (Trans.)

2 See volume 5, pp. 63ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

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reality which instigated God to send the Qur'an in order to teach the people true facts, practical laws, warnings and glad tiding. The verse is asking [rhetorically]: "What are these people anticipating? They have fabricated lies against God and denied His signs [7:37], even though God has completed His proof against them with the revelation of the Qur'an [7:52]. So are they waiting for the occurrence of that reality which backs the Qur'an? Were it not that they were anticipating that occurrence, they would not hesitate to grab onto this Book."

… The day when its fulfillment comes, those who had forgotten it…: Here God describes their condition on the day when the Qur'an's fulfillment shall occur. Then those who ignored the Qur'an will acknowledge the truth of the religions which God's messengers brought to them and made incumbent upon them. They will admit that what the prophets said was right—that God will indeed bring them back to life and will requite them for their compliance with His religion.

In that day, when they realize that their hands are empty of all good and they are doomed because of their wicked deeds, they will ask for either of two things: (1) having intercessors who would save them from the damnation which overshadows them; or (2) being returned to the world so that they may save themselves by doing good deeds—unlike their previous wicked behavior. Thus God narrates from them: *If only we had some intercessors to intercede for us, or we would be returned, so that we may do differently from what we did!*

… They have certainly ruined their souls, and what they used to fabricate has forsaken them: This sentence serves as a justification for the previous part of the verse, where the disbelievers will request to be either interceded for, or returned to the world. It is as if one would naturally ask, "Why do they make this request?" So here the verse answers that question. The implied meaning is: "*They have certainly ruined their souls* by taking their religion for diversion and play, and by choosing denial over submission. What stopped them from submitting to the truth in this world was their fabrications and fantasies, but all that will depart them. Thus they will realize that they need someone to amend their deeds—either themselves [by going back to the world and acting otherwise] or someone else who would intercede for them."

… If only we had some intercessors to intercede for us…: This sentence shows that there will be a number of intercessors on the Day of

Resurrection, because the verse says, *some intercessors* (in the plural). If it were only one, it would have said, "If only we had some intercessor to intercede for us" (in the singular). We explained this in our discussion on intercession under verses 2:47-48.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *And no one led us astray except the guilty* (26:99) Imam al-Bāqir said: [The leaders led their followers astray] by inviting them to their path [of sinning]. This is the same as what God says about them when He shall assemble them all in the fire: *the last of them will say to the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire"* (7:38). He also says: *Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse its sister [nation]. When they all rejoin in it* (7:38), then they dissociate themselves from one another and curse each other. They will start arguing against each other, in hopes of being relieved of the terrible punishment that has befallen them. However, the period of test and trial has expired, no excuse shall be accepted at that point, and it is no longer the time for [securing] salvation.[2]

Author's comment: The Imam has paraphrased the verse in this narration.

(2) Concerning *the gates of the heaven will not be opened* (tufattaḥu) *for them* (7:40) it is narrated that the Messenger of God recited it with *yufattaḥu* [or *yuftaḥu*][3] with letter *yā'* instead of *tā'*.[4]

(3) Al-Barrā' b. ʿĀzib says: Once we went to the funeral of a man from the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters) in the company of God's Messenger. When we reached the grave—where the niche (*laḥd*) had not been set up yet—the Messenger of God sat down and we sat down around him. We were [so still] as though there was a bird sitting on our head. He had a stick with which he was scratching

1 See volume 1, pp. 268ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

3 This does not change the meaning. Both words mean "being opened," where *tufattaḥu* is feminine while *yufattaḥu* and *yuftaḥu* are masculine. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of al-Barrā' b. ʿĀzib.

the ground [in a state of contemplation]. Then he raised his head and said twice or thrice, "Ask [God] protection from the punishment of the grave."

Then he added, "Indeed when a believer is about to depart this world and advance to the hereafter, some angels will descend upon him from the heaven, with bright faces that shine like the sun. They will come with pieces of shroud from the shrouds of paradise, and balm (*ḥanūṭ*) from the balms of paradise. They will sit before him within his view. Then the Angel of Death will come and sit by his head and tell him, 'O pure soul! Depart toward forgiveness and satisfaction from God.' Thus it [the believer's soul] will leave [the body], flowing out as water flows out of a waterskin, even though you do not see this. He [the Angel of Death] will grab the soul, but the angels will not let it remain in his hands for even a blink of an eye. Rather, they will take it and wrap it in the shrouds and embalm it with the balm [which they brought from paradise]. An aroma will emit from it like the best scent of musk that can be found on the face of the earth.

They will take the soul up [to the heavens], and whenever they pass by a group of angels, they will ask, 'Who is this pure soul?' They will reply, 'This is so-and-so, son of so-and-so,' naming him with the best epithets with which he was known in the world. When they reach the lowest heaven, they will ask it to be opened for him, and it will be opened. The most intimate angels of each heaven will accompany him up to the next heaven, until they arrive at the seventh heaven. There God will declare, 'Write the record of My servant in the ʿIlliyyūn (the Highest Heaven, the Elevated Record), then take him back to the earth, for indeed I create them from it, into it I shall return them, and from it shall I bring them forth another time [20:55].' Thus his soul is returned to his body.

Then the two angels [of inquisition] will go to him, sit next to him, and ask, 'Who is your lord?' He will reply, 'My Lord is Allah.' They will ask, 'What is your religion?' He will reply, 'My religion is Islam.'

They will ask, 'Who is this man who has been sent to you?' He will reply, 'He is God's messenger.'

They will ask, 'How do you know?' He will reply, 'I read God's Book, so I believed in it and accepted it.'
At that point a caller will call out from the heaven: 'My servant has indeed spoken the truth. Spread out his bed [or carpet] from paradise; dress him in garments from paradise; and open a door for him to paradise.' Through that the fragrant breeze of paradise will reach him. His grave will be extended as far as the eye can see. Then a man will come to him, having a fair look, fair clothes and fair smell, and will assure him, 'Rejoice in what pleases you! This is your day, which you were promised [21:103].' The believer will ask the man, 'Who are you? For indeed your face heralds good.' The man will explain, 'I am your good deeds.' Then the believer will pray to God, 'My Lord! Set up the Hour! Set up the Hour, so that I may return to my family and possessions [in triumph].'"
The Prophet continued: "Indeed when a disbeliever is about to depart this world and advance to the hereafter, some angels will descend upon him from the heaven, having dark faces and coming with some pieces of ragged cloth. They will sit before him within his view. Then the Angel of Death will come and sit by his head and tell him, 'O wicked soul! Depart toward wrath and dissatisfaction from God.' The Angel of Death will separate it [the disbeliever's soul] from his body and pull it out—like a [hot] skewer that is drawn out of wet wool [which removes the nap]. He [the Angel of Death] will grab it, but the angels will not let the soul remain in his hands for even a blink of an eye. They will place it in the ragged shrouds, and an odor will emit from it like the foulest smell of a carrion that can be found on the face of the earth. They will take the soul up [to the heavens], and whenever they pass by a group of angels, they will ask, 'Who is this wicked soul?' They will reply, 'This is so-and-so, son of so-and-so,' naming him with the most ignoble epithets that he was called in the world. When they reach the lowest heaven, they will ask it to be opened for him, but it will not be opened for him." Here the Messenger of God recited: *the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them* (7:40).
He continued: "God will declare, 'Write his record in the Sijjīn (the Lowest Hell, the Infernal Record), in the lowest earth.' Thus

his soul will be flung aside ungraciously." The Messenger of God recited: *Whoever ascribes partners to Allah is as though he had fallen from a height to be devoured by vultures, or to be blown away by the wind far and wide* (22:31).

He continued, "So his soul will be returned to his body. The two angels [of inquisition] will go to him, sit down, and ask him, 'Who is your lord?' He will say [being dumbfounded]: 'Um, um…' They will ask, 'What is your religion?' He will reply, 'Um, um… I don't know.'

They will ask, 'Who is this man who has been sent to you?' He will reply, 'Um, um… I don't know.'

At that point a caller will call out from the heaven: 'My servant has lied [that is, he did not speak the truth]. Spread out his bed from hell, and open a door for him to hell.' Through that the heat and miasma of hell will reach him. His grave will be tightened upon him such that his ribs will crush in from the two sides.

Then a man will come to him, having a foul look, foul clothes and foul smell, and will tell him, 'Prepare for what shall grieve you! This is your day, which you were promised.' The disbeliever will ask the man, 'Who are you? For indeed your face heralds evil.' The man will explain, 'I am your wicked deeds.' Then the disbeliever will pray to God, 'My Lord! Do not set up the Hour!'"[1]

Author's comment: This is a famous hadith which has been reported by many scholars, as you can see [in the footnote]. There are also Shia narrations to this effect from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. We presented some of them in our topical discussion of narrations under the verse: *And do not call those who were slain in Allah's way "dead"…* (2:154).[2]

(4) There is a hadith from Imam al-Bāqir about the seizing of the spirit of a disbeliever. There he says: When his spirit is taken to the lowest heaven, the gates of heaven will be closed on him. This is what God says: *the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them, nor shall they enter paradise until the camel passes through*

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭayālisī, Ibn Shaybah, Aḥmad, Hannād b. al-Sarī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Abū Dāwūd's *al-Sunan*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *ʿAdhāb al-qabr*.

2 See volume 2, pp. 217ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

the needle's eye, and thus do We requite the guilty (7:40). Then God will command: "Take the spirit back to the body [in the earth], for indeed *From it [earth] did We create you, into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you forth another time* (20:55)."[1]

(5) The Prophet recited the verse, *They shall have hell for their resting place, and over them shall be sheets [of fire]* (7:41), and said: There will be layers [of fire] above them and layers below them; one would not know whether the layers above are more or the layers below. The layers below will push them up, and the layers above will push down upon them. They will be squeezed between them until they are tightly fit there like the metal that is embedded into the end of an arrow.[2]

(6) [Imam] ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: By God, it was concerning us soldiers of Badr that this verse was revealed: *We will remove whatever rancor there is in their breasts* (7:43).[3]

Author's comment: This sentence appears in two places in the Qu'ran: (1) once among the current verses of discussion [in verse 7:43], which are Meccan verses; and (2) once in another verse which is also about the inhabitants of paradise, and also Meccan: *We will remove whatever rancor there is in their breasts; [intimate like] brothers, [they will be reclining] on couches, facing one another* (15:47). Hence, the sentence could not have been revealed on the day of Badr or concerning the soldiers of Badr.

(7) The Prophet said: Once the people of paradise pass the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*), they will be halted. Those of them who have wronged others will be made to compensate the victims for their wrong in this world. Thus they will enter paradise while there is no rancor in their hearts toward one another.[4]

(8) Concerning *And the call will be made to them: "This is your*

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Janāḥ, on the authority of ʿAwf b. ʿAbd-Allāh al-Azdī, on the authority of Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī. The same idea is also narrated from the Imam in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Abū al-Shaykh.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī].

paradise, which you have been given to inherit because of what you used to do!" (7:43) the Prophet said: The call will be made to them: "Be well, and you shall never fall ill! Indulge in blessings, and you shall never be let down! Remain young, and you shall never get old! Live forever, and you shall never die!"[1]

(9) The Messenger of God said: Everyone in hell will see his place in paradise and say, "Only if God had guided us," and that will cause them remorse. Everyone in paradise will see his place in hell and say, "Had it not been that God guided us," which is their gratitude.[2]

Author's comment: There are other narrations about the meaning of "inheriting paradise" which we shall present shortly, by God's will.

(10) The Messenger of God said: "On the Day of Resurrection the scale will be set up, where good deeds and evil deeds will be weighed against each other. If one's good deeds overweigh his evil deeds even by the slightest weight, he will enter paradise. If one's evil deeds overweigh his good deeds even by the slightest weight, he will enter hell."

Then he was asked, "What if someone's good deeds and evil deeds balance out, O Messenger of God?"

He explained: "They will be the occupants of the Elevations. *They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so* (7:46)."[3]

(11) Once the Messenger of God was asked about the occupants of the Elevations. He said: They are the last of the people to be judged. Once God finishes the judgment of His servants, He will address them [the occupants of the Elevations], "You are a people whose good deeds could take them out of the Fire, but could not take them to paradise. Now you shall be freed by Me, so stroll in paradise as you wish."[4]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Dārimī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and Abū Saʿīd.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Dhikr al-mawt*, and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir, on the

Author's comment: The idea that the occupants of the Elevations (*aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf*) are those whose good deeds and evil deeds are equal is also narrated from other Companions, including Ibn Masʿūd, Ḥudhayfah and Ibn ʿAbbās [in *al-Durr al-manthūr*].

(12) There is a hadith where Imam al-Ṣādiq classifies the people into six groups, one of which is the occupants of the Elevations. There he is asked, "Who are the occupants of the Elevations?" He replies, "They are those whose good deeds equal their evil deeds. If God sends them to hell, it will be because of their sins.[1] If He sends them to paradise, it will be because of His mercy."[2]

(13) Zurārah says: Once Imam al-Bāqir asked me: "What is your view concerning the occupants of the Elevations?"

I said, "They are either believers or unbelievers. If they enter paradise, then they are believers; if they enter hell, then they are unbelievers."[3]

The Imam said, "By God they are neither believers nor unbelievers. Had they been believers, they would have entered paradise like other believers; and had they been unbelievers, they would have entered hell like other unbelievers. Rather, they are a group whose good deeds and evil deeds are equal; their actions cannot get them through [all the way to paradise]. They are as God has said."[4]

I asked, "Are they among the people of paradise or among the people of hell?"

He said, "Leave them aside as God has left them."[5]

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authority of Abū Zurʿat b. ʿAmr b. Jarīr.

1 That is, it is not unjust of God to punish them since they are sinners. The next sentence means that they do not deserve to go to paradise by virtue of their good deeds alone. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥamzah al-Ṭayyār.

3 In other words, they may belong to either group, and their destiny will reveal which one. (Trans.)

4 The last sentence is a way of leaving further details about them to God's knowledge. In other words: *We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise* (2:32); *Their Lord knows them best* (18:21).

5 That is, we should suspend judgment about them as God has not determined

I asked, "Should I defer them [to God's command]?"[1]
"Yes," he confirmed. "Defer them as God has deferred them [to the Day of Judgment]. If He wants, He will send them to paradise by His mercy; and if He wants He will drive them to hell because of their sins—without being unjust to them."
I inquired, "Does anyone enter paradise except the believers?"
"No," he replied.
"Does anyone enter hell except the unbelievers?"
"No, unless God wills. Zurārah, I say 'whatsoever God wills [shall happen]' (*mā shāʾ Allāh*). Now, if you wax proud you will become renegade and untie your knot."[2]

Author's comment: The last part of the hadith means: "If you reject and refuse to yield to what I say, you will go out of the true path which you were following, and the bond of confirmation [of the truth] will be untied from your heart."

As we can see, the above narrations [numbers 10-13] define the occupants of the Elevations as those whose good deeds and evil deeds balance on the scale. According to one of these narrations [number 10], the last part of verse 7:46—*They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so*—is about them. However, this interpretation is not compatible with the verses of *aʿrāf* [7:46-49], as we explained above.

Besides, as we discussed in our exposition of the verse, *The weight [of deeds] on that day is the truth* (7:8), the scale on the Day of Judgment will either be heavy with good deeds, or light because of evil deeds. Evil deeds do not have a weight to *balance* the weight of good deeds. If one's scale does not determine which side dominates, it means that the person's acts have no weight on that day, such as a disbeliever whose good deeds are cancelled.[3] Another possibility would be disadvantaged individuals (*mustaḍʿafūn*) who do not receive the full message [of revelation] and are thus not held accountable for religious obligations.

We can infer from the last narration that those "whose good deeds

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their end for us. (Trans.)

1 That is: "Should I leave their case open, waiting to be decided by God's command?" This is called *irjāʾ*, and those with an indeterminate end are called *al-murjawn* (the deffered), as used in verse 9:106. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 This refers to verse 18:105. (Trans.)

and evil deeds are equal" are the same as *mustaḍʿafūn*, who will be waiting for God's decree of either forgiveness or punishment. This means that what is meant by the "balancing" of the acts is that neither side *overcomes* the other [not that evil deeds have some *weight*]. This way we can explain away the problem of weight and scale, but there still remains the problem of disagreement with the apparent meaning of the verses. The lofty descriptions given in these verses for the people of *aʿrāf* can only be matched with the qualities of *al-sābiqūn* and *al-muqarrabūn* (those who are foremost in surpassing others toward good; those who are nearmost to God) [56:10-11]. They will be at the highest positions in the noble sanctuaries of felicity, while the *mustaḍʿafūn* would at most be saved and placed in the lowest levels of paradise.

(14) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Aʿrāf* is a bridge between paradise and hell. There will stand all prophets with their successors, along with the sinners of their time, just as the commander of an army stands by his weak division. This is while the virtuous have proceeded to paradise. The successor will tell the sinners with him: "Look at your virtuous brothers who have hastened [to paradise before you]." The sinners will greet them, and this is what God says: *They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, "Peace be to you!"* (7:46). Then He adds: *They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so* (7:46), meaning that the sinners have not yet entered paradise, but they hope that God will grant them permission through the intercession of their prophet and Imam. Then the sinners will look at the inmates of hell and say: *"Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!"* (7:47).

The occupants of the Elevations (*aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf*)—meaning the prophets and their successors—will address some men in hell with rebuke: *Your amassing did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain. Are these the ones concerning whom you swore* (7:48-49)—referring to the weak individuals [standing with the prophets and the successors on the Elevations]. "These are the *mustaḍʿafūn* (the disadvantaged, those whom you oppressed), whom you disparaged because of their poverty, and whom you subdued with your worldly possessions." Then they will address the weak individuals—following God's command about them: *Enter paradise! You*

shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve (7:49).[1]

Author's comment: As we see, this narration clearly mentions the *mustaḍᶜafūn* instead of those whose good deeds equal their evil deeds. It says there are some *mustaḍᶜafūn* who are eager to enter paradise and seek refuge with God from entering hell. Yet, the narration does not equate them with the men on the Elevations *who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46), and whom are called *the occupants of the Elevations* (7:48). This makes the narration more commensurate with the verse. The only problem that remains is that the verses suggest that those who greet the inhabitants of paradise are "the certain men (*rijāl*) on the Elevations" who are also called "the occupants of the Elevations" (*aṣḥāb al-aᶜrāf*) [not the *mustaḍᶜafūn*].

These narrations show an apparent confusion, caused by transmitters who did not grasp the intended meaning of the hadith, who then proceeded to narrate their misunderstanding as hadith. Perhaps what was originally said by the Prophet or the Imams was that there are some *mustaḍᶜafūn* whom God will grant permission to paradise through intercession [by His prophets and saints] or through His will (*mashiyyah*). Then this idea was modified to the form that we see in the above narrations due to missing the exact words and transmitting the perceived meaning. This is quite clear. We see the same phenomena in the other narrations which interpret the men on the Elevations as those whose good deeds and evil deeds balance, reported from Ibn ᶜAbbās, Ibn Masᶜūd, Ḥudhayfah and others, notwithstanding their different wordings. The same can be observed in al-Qummī's narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq. Interested readers should refer to these narrations in order to verify our claim.[2]

(15) Jābir b. Yazīd says: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir, "Who are the *aᶜrāf*?" He said, "They are the noblest of the people to God."[3]

Author's comment: The question shows that the inquirer assumed *aᶜrāf* and the people on it to be the same, and the Imam answered him based on his assumption. Apparently he assumed *aᶜrāf* to be the plural of

1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*. Al-Qummī has reported a similar narration from the Imam in his *Tafsīr*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, on the authority of Abū Ayyūb, on the authority of Marthad.

2 See the previous footnote, and also the author's comment under hadith 11 above. (Trans.)

3 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, via its chain of narration.

ʿurf, meaning "one who knows" (*ʿarīf* and *ʿārif*). There are many narrations to this effect; we shall present some of them below.

(16) Concerning *And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: We [Ahl al-Bayt] are the occupants of the Elevations. Whoever recognizes us [or whomever we recognize] (*man ʿarafanā*) will end up in paradise, and whoever does not recognize us [or whomever we do not recognize] (*man ankaranā*) will be destined for hell.[1]

Author's comment: *Man ʿarafanā* and *man ankaranā* can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "Those whom we recognize" and "those whom we do not recognize," respectively. This would correspond to the apparent meaning of the verse. (2) "Those who recognize us" and "those who do not recognize us." Given other similar narrations [such as the next two], what is meant is "those who recognize us and we recognize them" and "those who do not recognize us and we do not recognize them."[2]

(17) Once someone recited the verse *And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46) in the presence of Imam ʿAlī. The Imam told him: *We* [Ahl al-Bayt] are the *aʿrāf*: we recognize (*naʿrifu*) our supporters by their marks. *We* are the *aʿrāf*: God can only be known through the path of our knowledge (*maʿrifah*). *We* are the *aʿrāf*: we shall stand between paradise on hell on the Day of Resurrection, where no one shall enter paradise except for those who recognize us (*ʿarafanā*) and we recognize them (*ʿarafnāhu*), and no one shall enter hell except for those who do not recognize us (*ankaranā*) and we do not recognize them (*ankarnāhu*). Had God willed, He would have made Himself known to the people—so that they may know Him, acknowledge His oneness, and advance toward Him through His

1 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 The second meaning is a more apparent interpretation of *man ʿarafanā* and *man ankaranā*; the meaning that springs to mind first. That is why the first interpretation is offered in [square brackets] as an alternative. Given the more apparent meaning, the narration suggests a possible alternative translation of the verse: *And on the Elevations will be certain men, each of whom (everyone) knows by their mark* or *each of whom is known (to everyone) by their mark*. (Trans.)

[direct] gate[1]—but He made us His gates, His path, His way, and the door through which one advances toward Him.[2]

Author's comment: The one who asked about the verse was Ibn al-Kawwāʾ [the Khārijite leader]. "Recognition" (*maʿrifah*) in this hadith reduces to love and hate (*ḥubb* and *bughḍ*). It means: "No one shall enter paradise except for those who acknowledge our *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) and whom we acknowledge their obedience [to us]; and no one shall enter hell except for those who do not acknowledge our *wilāyah* and whom we do not acknowledge their obedience." This is different from the Ahl al-Bayt's universal recognition of every individual. Otherwise, the narration would contravene the verses, which say: *certain men who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46) and: *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks…* (7:48). Perhaps this is because some transmitters have narrated only the meaning as opposed to the exact words of the Imam. The next hadith confirms our view.

(18) Once Ibn al-Kawwāʾ went to [Imam] ʿAlī and asked him about this verse [7:46]. He replied: Where are you, Ibn al-Kawwāʾ!? We [Ahl al-Bayt] shall stand between paradise and hell on the Day of Resurrection. We will recognize anyone who supported us, and will admit him to paradise; and we will recognize anyone who hated us, and will send him to hell.[3]

(19) Hilqām says: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse: *And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46). "What does God mean by the certain men on the Elevations?" He said, "Don't you have some individuals in your tribes, known as *ʿurafāʾ*, who know everyone in the tribe, both the virtuous and the wicked?"

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1 The part between the dashes is not found in most versions of this narration, and the meaning is clearer without it. (Trans.)

2 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Aṣbagh b. Nubātah. It is also narrated via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muqarrin, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. Al-Kulaynī has also reported the account in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Muqarrin, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskānī, via his unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*), on the authority of al-Aṣbagh b. Nubātah.

"Yes," I confirmed.

"We [Ahl al-Bayt] are" he said, "those men *who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46)."[1]

Author's comment: This is based on interpreting *aʿrāf* as the plural of *ʿurf*, like *aqṭāb* which is the plural of *quṭb* (pole). *ʿUrf* means *maʿrūf* (that which is known). Apparently it is originally a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) which is used as an object (*mafʿūl*). Then the meaning of *And on the* aʿrāf *will be certain men* (7:46) would be: "There will be certain men who are placed in charge of the known (*maʿrūf*) affairs and conditions of the people."[2] This does not contradict what we said above [in exposition], that *aʿrāf* is the higher parts of the *ḥijāb* (barrier, veil); nor does it contradict the other narrations which we quoted above, saying that "*aʿrāf* is a ridge between paradise and hell"[3] because the above hadith interprets *aʿrāf* according to its etymological significance, which is latent in all derivatives and applications of that root.

We should add that there are truly many narrations from the Imams concerning the meaning of *aʿrāf* and its occupants. What we presented above was only a sample, meant to sufficiently show the diverse range of interpretations narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt.

(20) Ibn ʿAbbās said: *Aʿrāf* is an elevated position by the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*), where there will be ʿAbbās, Ḥamzah, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and Jaʿfar who will have two wings. They will recognize their followers (*shīʿah*) based on their bright faces, and their enemies based on their dark faces.[4]

(21) Once someone asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! Who are the occupants of the Elevations?" He replied, "They are those who participated in holy war (jihad) without permission from their fathers, and were martyred in God's way. Their martyrdom

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 In other words, the preposition *ʿalá* (on, over) indicates supervision and superintendence. They are on top of such knowledge; they know the characteristics of all people. (Trans.)

3 See hadith 14 above. (Trans.)

4 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī*. As we said above [under "Assessing the View of *Tafsīr al-manār*"] this is also reported in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī*, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn ʿAbbās.

prevents them from entering hell, and their disobedience toward their fathers prevents them from entering paradise. They will be the last group to enter paradise."[1]

Author's comment: The same idea is narrated through other chains of transmission, from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Abū Hurayrah and Ibn ʿAbbās. As we mentioned above,[2] it suffers from incompatibility with the apparent meaning of the verses [which offer a very high regard for the occupants of the Elevations]. Moreover, based on established and unanimous principles, in cases where leaving for jihad is *wājib ʿaynī* (individual duty, obligatory on every person), then parental consent is not applicable [as a required condition]; and in cases where leaving for jihad is not obligatory on the person because it remains only as a collective duty (*wājib kifāʾī*), then their act would be forbidden, and being martyred in battle would be of no avail to them. The only remaining possibility is if they are ignorant of the rule, in which case the above account is saying that the occupants of the Elevations are among the *mustaḍʿafūn* (the disadvantaged). We already discussed this possibility.[3]

(22) Concerning *Then a caller will announce in their midst, "May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers!"* (7:44) Imam al-Riḍā said: The caller will be the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī].[4]

(23) Concerning the same verse, Imam al-Bāqir said: The caller will be ʿAlī.[5]

(24) Imam al-Bāqir said: After the Battle of Nahrawān, when Imam ʿAlī was back in Kūfah, he was told that Muʿāwiyah curses him, accuses him, and kills his companions. There he stood up and delivered a sermon, where he said: "I am the caller in this world and the hereafter. God says: *Then a caller will announce in their midst, "May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers!"* (7:44); *I* am that

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāmah's *Musnad*, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Mālik al-Hilālī, on the authority of his father.

2 See the last interpretation under the section entitled "Views of Other Exegetes." (Trans.)

3 See the author's comment under hadith 14. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kāfī* and *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via their chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Fuḍayl. The same hadith is also narrated by al-ʿAyyāshī.

5 *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*.

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caller. And He says: *[This is] an announcement from Allah and His Messenger* (9:3); I am that announcement."[1]

Author's comment: Given the first part of the quote, what is meant by the last part is that "I am the *announcer* of that announcement," referring to the story of conveying the verses of *barāʾah* (repudiation, dissociation, renunciation) [to the polytheists in Mecca during the hajj season].

(25) [Imam] ʿAlī said: *I* am that caller.[2]

(26) Ibn ʿAbbās said: In God's Book there are some names for ʿAlī which the people do not know. [One of them is where] God says: *Then a caller will announce in their midst* (7:44); he [ʿAlī] is the caller among them, who will declare: "May God's curse be on those who denied my *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) and neglected my right."[3]

Imam ʿAlī as the Caller

Al-Ālūsī says in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*:

> Concerning the verse, *Then a caller will announce…* (7:44) it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that the caller will be "the blower of the Trumpet" [that is, Isrāfīl, Seraphiel]. Others have said that it will be Mālik, "the guardian of hell." Others have said that it will be some other angel besides these two, where God will command that angel to make this call. Shias have narrated from [Imam] al-Riḍā and Ibn ʿAbbās that it will be ʿAlī. However, this cannot be verified with the Sunni chains of narration. Moreover, it is unlikely for the Imam to be the caller because at that point he will be in *ḥaẓāʾir al-quds* (domains of holiness, sacred sanctuaries of heaven).

The author of *al-Manār* quotes this [from al-Ālūsī] and then adds:

> Experts on the transmitters of narrations [that is, the scholars of of *rijāl*] have not based their appraisals on the denomination of the person. Among some of their leading transmitters [whom they have approved to be credible] are individuals that

1 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir al-Juʿfī.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskānī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyyah.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskānī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

> are classified as the followers (Shia) of ʿAlī and his progeny, such as ʿAbd al-Razzāq [b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī] and al-Ḥākim [al-Ḥaskānī]. All experts [of *rijāl*] have authenticated the transmission of many Shia transmitters. Therefore, if the transmission of above narration is authenticated, we will accept it, and the fact that he [the Imam] is in *ḥaẓāʾir al-quds* is not sufficient to disprove the narration. If we can interpret the ascription of the call to the Imam in a way that counts as a divine merit or reward for him, then we will accept the narration even if its chain of transmission is not authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*)—as long as it is not contradicted or rejected by another narration which is stronger in terms of either transmission or content.

This is a good answer by the author of *al-Manār*, but we should clarify that we do not consider a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) to be authoritative (*ḥujjah*) unless it is coupled with decisive evidence which result in definite knowledge for the individual [scholar]. This is applicable to all solitary reports, whether about historical accounts, merits of individuals, or other topics. The only exception is jurisprudence, where collective acceptance of a narration [by a number of scholars] is sufficient for its authority. Of course, all of this is conditional on the narration not contravening the Qur'an. Further details should be pursued in principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).

Making this announcement is certainly a merit for the Imam, and this is nothing to be disputed. We can infer the significance of announcement in the hereafter by reflecting on its significance in this world. Announcement means making a declaration on behalf of a ruler to those who are subject to that rule. A *muʾadhdhin* (caller, announcer) is a link which connects the ruler to the ruled by stating the ruler's judgment to the subjects. The merit or demerit of a link is according to what it connects to. Being a connecting link to God would certainly be an unsurpassed merit and excellence for that link. An example of this can be seen in the intermediation of Abraham in making God's announcement: *And proclaim the hajj to people* (22:27). Another example is the intermediation of Imam ʿAlī in conveying the verses of *barāʾah*: *[This is] an announcement from Allah and His Messenger* (9:3).

This is the meaning of announcement in this world, which is a legislative declaration of a rule to those who are subject to it. However,

announcement in the hereafter is not a legislative declaration, but it means *causing* an event and *establishing* the reality of a command. In this case [verse 7:44], it means establishing the eternal damnation of wrongdoers and their absolute distance from divine mercy, following their acknowledgment to the truth of God's promises, which they received through His prophets and messengers [as mentioned at the beginning of the verse]. This means that the caller on that day will materialize God's promises and threats to the wrongdoers; he is the one who metes out the consequence of their deeds to them. The reader should reflect on this and should not underestimate the significance of real matters [as opposed to conventional and legislative matters]. This is worthy of further and more rigorous investigation by those who have the aptitude for it.[1]

The above is what the Imam meant when he referred to himself as being "the caller in this world and the hereafter." As we saw above, this is narrated in the Shia sources through various chains of narration from Imams ʿAlī, al-Bāqir and al-Riḍā [hadiths 22-24]. It is also narrated in the Sunni sources by al-Ḥākim, from Imam ʿAlī and Ibn ʿAbbās [hadiths 25-26]. Al-Ḥākim is a reliable reporter and transmitter of hadith. He is often quoted in commentaries that are based on hadith as well as other commentaries in general. However, none of the Sunni exegetes has quoted him on this narration; even someone like al-Suyūṭī—who has an exhaustive coverage of narrations in *al-Durr al-manthūr*—has left out this hadith. I wonder what the reason is behind this!

1 The hereafter is not a realm of religious injunctions. Therefore, any command or prohibition on that day should be interpreted as a *takwīnī* (creational, causal, existential) order. This means that the caller to an event is part of the causal chain (which brings that event to existence) for the occurrence of that event. This can be compared to the working of our nervous system: when the brain orders a muscle to move, the brain's command is tantamount to the movement of the muscle, and the muscle has no choice in this. The motor neurons which convey (or "announce") the brain's command to the muscle play a causal role in this process. The broadcaster of a rule is an extension of the judge and part of the decision-making process. If the rule is legislative, conventional or verbal, the broadcaster's role will be as such; and if the rule is creational or causal, so will the broadcaster's role. *And the loftiest description belongs to Allah, and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise* (16:60). (Trans.)

Verses 54-58

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِی خَلَقَ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ فِی سِتَّةِ أَیَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوی عَلَی
الْعَرْشِ یُغْشِی اللَّیْلَ النَّهارَ یَطْلُبُهُ حَثِیثاً وَ الشَّمْسَ وَ الْقَمَرَ وَ النُّجُومَ مُسَخَّراتٍ
بِأَمْرِهِ أَلا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَ الْأَمْرُ تَبارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعالَمِینَ ﴿٥٤﴾ ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعاً وَ
خُفْیَةً إِنَّهُ لا یُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِینَ ﴿٥٥﴾ وَ لا تُفْسِدُوا فِی الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلاحِها وَ ادْعُوهُ
خَوْفاً وَ طَمَعاً إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِیبٌ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِینَ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَ هُوَ الَّذِی یُرْسِلُ الرِّیاحَ
بُشْراً بَیْنَ یَدَیْ رَحْمَتِهِ حَتَّی إِذا أَقَلَّتْ سَحاباً ثِقالاً سُقْناهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَیِّتٍ فَأَنْزَلْنا بِهِ
الْماءَ فَأَخْرَجْنا بِهِ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَراتِ كَذلِكَ نُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتی لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾ وَ
الْبَلَدُ الطَّیِّبُ یَخْرُجُ نَباتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَ الَّذِی خَبُثَ لا یَخْرُجُ إِلاَّ نَكِداً كَذلِكَ
نُصَرِّفُ الْآیاتِ لِقَوْمٍ یَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(7:54) *Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He settled on the Throne. He draws the night's cover over the day, which pursues it swiftly, and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] subservient by His command. Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations.*

(7:55) *Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly and secretly. Indeed He does not like the transgressors.*

(7:56) *And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration, and supplicate Him with fear and hope: indeed Allah's mercy is close to the virtuous.*

(7:57) *It is He who sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy. When they bear [rain-]laden clouds, We drive them toward a dead land and send down water on it, and with it We bring forth all kinds of crops. Thus shall We raise the dead; maybe you will take admonition.*

(7:58) *The good land—its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely. Thus do We paraphrase the signs variously for a people who give thanks.*

Introduction

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These verses are connected to the previous set of verses and build on them. The main theme of the previous verses was to explain the unpleasant consequences of associating partners with God and rejecting His signs, which would cause eternal damnation and everlasting wretchedness for the person. These verses provide an argument to justify that by explaining that the Lord of all beings is One, and He alone directs the affairs of all. Hence, it is incumbent on everyone to call Him and be grateful to Him.

These verses prove God as the sole Lord of the worlds in two ways: (1) He is the One Who has created the heavens and the earth, and Who directs their affairs in the best way, through an ordered network [of causes and effects] which connects all beings in the universe. Hence, He alone is the Lord of all beings. (2) He is the One Who provides for the people by bringing out all kinds of fruits and crops. He creates these products through the most brilliant and elegant way, which is the rain. Thus He is the Lord of everyone, and they have no lord besides Him.

Commentary

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِی خَلَقَ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ فِی سِتَّةِ أَیَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوی عَلَی الْعَرْشِ یُغْشِی اللَّیْلَ النَّهارَ یَطْلُبُهُ حَثِیثاً وَ الشَّمْسَ وَ الْقَمَرَ وَ النُّجُومَ مُسَخَّراتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَ الْأَمْرُ تَبارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعالَمِینَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(7:54) ***Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He settled on the Throne. He draws the night's cover over the day, which pursues it swiftly, and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] subservient by His command. Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations.***

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We shall fully discuss the meaning of "heaven" and the six days of creation in our exposition of Sūrah Fuṣṣilat [verses 41:9-12], by God's will.

… ***then He settled*** **(istawá)** ***on the Throne*** **(al-ʿarsh).** ***He draws the***

night's cover over the day, which pursues it swiftly, and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] subservient by His command …: *Istiwāʾ* means "being firmly established, positioned and ensconced on something." Sometimes it is used synonymously with *tasāwī* (equality). For instance, it is said that "Zayd and ʿAmr *istawá*," meaning that they are equal [in a certain property]. Similarly the Qur'an says: *They are not equal with Allah* (9:19).

ʿArsh (throne) means "the seat where a king sits." Sometimes it is used metaphorically, indicating the station of sovereignty, dominion and majesty. Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> The original meaning of *ʿarsh* is "something that is roofed." Its plural is *ʿurūsh*, as God says: *it lay fallen on its roofs* (ʿurūsh) (2:259). Similarly, when one sets up trellises for vine, one would say *ʿarashtu al-karm*. When one makes something that resembles a roof for something, one says: *ʿarrashtuhu*…
>
> *ʿArsh* can also be compared to the *hūdaj* (howdah, litter) used to carry women, because the *hūdaj* has the shape of vine trellis. When one raises a sunshade above a well, one says: *ʿarrashtu al-biʾr*. A ruler's seat is called *ʿarsh* since it is an elevated position…
>
> What we humans know of God's *ʿarsh* is only a name. It is not what ordinary people imagine it to be, because then God would be *carried on* His Throne, not the *carrier* of the Throne, while He says: *Indeed Allah sustains the heavens and the earth lest they should fall apart, and if they were to fall apart there is none who can sustain them except Him* (35:41).
>
> Some have said that *ʿarsh* (Throne) is the highest sphere (*falak al-aʿlá*), while *kursī* (Pedestal) is the sphere of fixed stars (*falak al-kawākib*).[1] They support this interpretation by a Prophetic narration: "The seven heavens and the seven earths compared to the *kursī* are like a mere ring thrown in a vast plain, and the *kursī*

1 This is based on the Ptolemaic system which was integrated into neo-Platonic cosmology, all of which later composed the foundation of Islamic philosophy. It was thought that the material world consists of nine concentric firmaments or spheres (called *aflāk*) which are superimposed on each other. The highest of these, the ninth firmament, is a starless sphere called *falak al-aṭlas*. The one right below it, the eighth firmament, was the sphere of fixed stars, called *falak al-thawābit*. (Trans.)

compared to the *ʿarsh* has the same relation."

It has been a consistent custom in all times to seat the heads and rulers of the society in an exclusive fashion that distinguishes them from others. They were provided with special cushions and carpets, and later on with special couches and seats. This way, the word *ʿarsh* started to convey the meaning of kingdom. It conveys this meaning to a more exclusive and highlighted degree compared to *kursī*, which includes other kinds of seats and positions as well. Due to repeated usage, the concept of "kingdom" was designated by the word *ʿarsh* (throne), just as initially the royal seat was known by the concept of "kingdom." Thus the word *ʿarsh* began to carry the meaning of kingdom and represent the position of dominion and authority; that is the meaning which it reduces to. It refers to the focal point where all affairs of the society are planned and governed.

To better understand this, imagine a collection of people who gather in a place to form a country together, based on natural, economic or political conditions. They found an independent society of their own and start interacting with each other and exchanging their products. They determine each person's share based on the weight of the person's contribution to the society. Now, if they want to maintain their unity, they have no alternative but to have a leader who would take charge of their social order. We know beyond doubt, based on repeated observations, that when a group of people form a single unit and pursue common interests, they cannot maintain their unity and solidarity due to the various forces and intentions involved, unless there is a centralized authority which brings together all differences. There must be a single body that maintains their unity and gives life to the community through its proper direction. Otherwise, the group will immediately disintegrate and break apart.

This is why we see that in modern societies, every affair is classified as a specific category or branch, headed by a certain office or administrative body. There is an intermediate "seat" (*kursī*) which directs and takes charge of the different branches. Then these seats, being themselves of several categories, are headed by a higher authority or "seat" that supervises them. And thus the system escalates to a single position which holds the reign of all affairs. That is the ultimate "throne" (*ʿarsh*) and the person who is seated in that position.

It is interesting how this authority is so extended and comprehensive despite its unity: a single command which is issued from the top authority

trickles down to the numerous lower offices, taking a different shape in every level according to that level. It appears at every stage in a way that is meaningful to the person in charge of executing that stage of the command. The top authority orders: "Direct the affairs!" whereby the financial body adopts it as a financial directive; the political body adopts it a political directive; and the martial body adopts it as a military directive. It is determined and delimited at every stage all the way from the top to the bottom.

Going from bottom to top, the infinitely many minor and particular acts and laws which are executed in the nation are collected and centered at intermediate "seats" in several stages of aggregation, until all affairs reach the ultimate "throne" where everything is combined and united. On the one hand, the throne is one, because it is a single position directed by a single authority. On the other hand, in its oneness it includes all the detailed and differentiated levels of authority which lie below it at the lower levels. Going from top to bottom, this oneness constantly multiplies and differentiates until it reaches the specific commands which are applicable at the individual level in the society.

The above illustration pertains to our conventional systems of government. This conventional system is necessarily extracted from a similar order in the world of creation. If one reflects on the world of existence, one would realize that it is governed by a similar order of authority: particular events are caused by particular means and forces, which are themselves caused by more universal forces, until they all end up in God as their ultimate cause. The difference there is that God is not a distant cause at one end of the chain, but He is there with every event and present at every level of creation; He encompasses everything. This difference is because God's *mulk* (kingdom, sovereignty, authority) is real, while *mulk* in the human domain is conventional.[1]

This means that the reign of every cause and effect in the world of creation—despite their enormous diversity, multitude and levels—is gathered and held in a single stage of authority which is called "the Throne" (*al-ʿarsh*), as we shall elaborate on it shortly. The Throne is a locus of all

1 In other words, God's authority over something is based on Him being the source of existence of that thing, while human authority is based on social contract. (Trans.)

existential and creational forms (*ṣuwar kawniyyah*)[1] which are directed by God's command according to His will; *And with Him are the treasures of the unseen* (6:59).

… then He settled on the Throne…: This is a metaphorical expression to God's command of His kingdom and His direction of all affairs in the world of creation. It refers to His all-encompassing authority which extends to anything big or small. It is the source from which the order of every affair in the universe issues, through which every being is directed toward its goal and meets its needs. That is why in a similar verse in Sūrah Yūnus God says: *then He settled on the Throne, directing the command* (10:3). The verse means that the Throne represents the divine direction of affairs in the universe.

… He draws* (yughshī) *the night's cover over the day…: The verb *yughshī* is synonymous with *yasturu* (covers, conceals, veils). It means: "God covers the night with the day."[2]

…which pursues it swiftly* (ḥathīthan)*…: The night chases the day in order to cover and conceal it. *Ḥathīth* is synonymous with *sarīʿ* (fast, quick, swift). This expression suggests that darkness is the primary state of the earth, and the day is an accidental quality which comes on top of the night because of sunlight. The night is the dark cone which always shadows half of the earth that is not facing the sun. Based on the verse's imagery, it is as if the night is always chasing and assaulting the day.

… and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] subservient by His command* (bi-amrihi)*…: The three words at the beginning of the phrase here—*the sun, the moon, and the stars*—are in the accusative form,[3] meaning that they are the objects of *Allah, Who created*. This means

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1 "Form" (*ṣurah*) here does not mean a mental image that is conceived by the intellect. Rather, it is meant in its ontological sense, as an undifferentiated stage of existence of something, where it is not yet attached to matter. (Trans.)

2 The verb *yughshī* is ditransitive, where its direct object is "that which is covered" and its indirect object is the cover. Either object may come first. Therefore the verse can also be translated as: "He covers the night with the day," which is arguably more apparent. Both the verse and the author have used masculine pronouns for day and night, which makes it difficult to discern the intended order. The idea that night is the cover can be confirmed with the verse: *And a sign for them is the night, which We strip of daylight* (36:37). The author's subsequent exposition seems to support this interpretation. (Trans.)

3 That is, they are *manṣūb* in terms of inflection: *al-shamsa wa al-qamara wa*

that *subservient by His command* serves as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition in which the sun, the moon, and the stars are created. The meaning would be: "And He created the sun, the moon and the stars while they are subjugated by His command"—they follow the course that He wills for them, toward a goal that He has willed for them. The letter *bāʾ* in *bi-amrihi* ("by" in *by His command*) indicates *sababiyyah* (causality or instrumentality).[1] Several reciters have recited the three words with *rafʿ*,[2] which makes them the subject of a new sentence, whose predicate would be: *are subservient by His command*.

Given the theme of the verse, this entire phrase—*He draws the night's cover over the day…*—serves as an interpretation and elaboration for: *then He settled on the Throne*. We see a similar pattern in all verses which talk about the Throne [and the idea of God settling on it], where there is some reference made, either directly or indirectly, to God's direction of the affairs of creation.

The Meaning of Creation (*Khalq*) and Command (*Amr*)

… Look! All creation* (al-khalq) *and command* (al-amr) *belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations: The word *khalq* is originally synonymous with *taqdīr* (measurement, determination, design, arrangement).[3] It means "putting two things together in order to define

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al-nujūma. (Trans.)

1 That is: "The world is made subservient *because of* His command, *through* His command, or *by means of* His command." (Trans.)

2 That is, they are recited as *marfūʿ* in terms of inflection: *al-shamsu wa al-qamaru wa al-nujūmu*. The meaning would be: "And the sun, the moon and the stars are all subservient to His command." (Trans.)

3 The inherent ambiguity in the word *taqdīr*, and the complexity of the context, both make it impossible to come up with a single English equivalent for the term. "Measurement" is accurate literally, while "determination," "design" and "arrangement" are more pertinent contextually. To put it more simply, *khalq* can be compared with sewing a garment, where the tailor measures, cuts and arranges the different parts of a dress according to an initial plan. This illustration should make tangible what the author means in the following lines. *Taqdīr* means "defining the limits of something," which is a way of giving identity to something and bringing it to existence. Thus the relationship between *taqdīr* and *khalq* (creation): the meaning of creation (*khalq*) is definition (*taqdīr*). Therefore, "creation *ex nihilo*" does not mean "turning

the measures and bounds of something new." However, in the context of religion it means "to originate and give existence to something *ex nihilo*" (*ibdāʿ*, *ījād*). The word *amr* has two meanings: (1) As a noun it is synonymous with *shaʾn* (affair, status, case, issue, condition). Its plural form is *umūr*. (2) As a verb it means "to order, to command." When one charges someone to perform an act, one would say: *amartuhu amran*. It is quite possible that the original meaning of *amr* was its verbal meaning, then the nominal meaning was deduced from performing an order. A command (*amr*) tends to give more structure and order to the life and affairs of the one who is commanded. That is why one's status and condition (*shaʾn*) in life is called *amr*. Then the usage of the word was generalized to other beings. The *amr* (affair, matter) of anything is an optimal condition which puts the affairs of that thing into order and gives direction to its various aspects, movements, actions and objectives. For instance, it is said, "The *amr* of a servant is up to his master"; "The *amr* of wealth is up to its owner"; and "The *amr* of a person is up to his Lord." All these statements express who is in charge of directing and managing the life and affairs of that person or thing.

The plural form of the first meaning of *amr*—the nominal sense, synonymous with *shaʾn*—is *umūr*, while the plural form of the second meaning—the verbal sense, which is the opposite of *nahy* (to prohibit, to forbid)—is *awāmir*. It may be objected that this difference shows that they are two different terms, and one cannot be reduced to another. However, this is not a valid objection, as there are many other terms that have a

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nothing into something" because that is arguably nonsensical and impossible. What is *nihil* prior to creation is the particular definition and determination of the object, not its existence. Hence, the proper meaning of *khalq*—or creation *ex nihilo*—is the delineation of the existence—which already *is*—into a particular definition and measure. This means that *khalq* is not the creation of "existence" (*wujūd*), but the creation of "quiddity" (*māhiyyah*). In simpler words, *existence* is not created, but *definitions* are created. Incidentally, this etymological analysis of *khalq* also has metaphysical significance based on the theory of emanation (*ifāḍah*). In the first stage, God's effusion unfolds as formless and unbounded existence (called *al-wujūd al-munbasiṭ*), which can be compared to an extended fabric. Then it is determined and delimited into various forms and shapes, which gives rise to multiplicity. This determination of the universal into the particular is based on God's eternal knowledge and plan, which includes all particulars in an undifferentiated form (called permanent archetypes, *al-aʿyān al-thābitah*). (Trans.)

similar case. Anyone who studies linguistics will come across several such alternatives [which are derived from the same original meaning].

Amr is like a medium which connects on one end to "the owner of command"—such as a master—and on the other end to "the one who is commanded"—such as a servant. Thus it is annexed and ascribed to both. Sometimes it is said, "the servant's *amr* (matter, case, command)" as the Qur'an says: *and his matter* (amr) *shall rest with Allah* (2:275); and sometimes it is said, "the master's *amr* (matter, case, command)" as the Qur'an says: *Allah's command* (amr) *is coming* (16:1).

Everything has an aspect of *amr* (command, affair) which belongs to God, and this *amr* is defined and interpreted in the following verses: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is. So glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things and to Whom you shall be brought back* (36:82-83). "All things" in verse 36:83 includes any essence, quality, action or effect. Their *amr*, which is in the hands of God, is the word "be" (*kun*), which indicates *ījād* (existentiation, giving existence to an entity). God's *amr* is the existence that He bestows upon all things, by which they come to existence. When He says to something, "be," it becomes. This bestowed existence is connected to God on one end, and in this sense it is called "God's *amr* (command)," which is the divine word, "be." It is also connected to the being which is given existence, and thus it can be ascribed to the being as "its *amr*," which again is the aspect of the being that traces back to God. This aspect is referred to as "and it is" (*fa-yakūnu*) in verse 36:82. The first aspect [which relates to God] can be called *ījād* (existentiation), and the second aspect [which relates to the recipient] can be called *wujūd* (existence, being).[1] The Qur'an mentions various qualities and features for each of these two aspects of *amr*, which we shall discuss in its appropriate place, if God wills.[2]

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1 *Ījād* and *wujūd* differ only in terms of perspective or relation, not in terms of their reality and essence. The former is from the standpoint of the subject (the donor of existence), while the latter is from the standpoint of the object (the recipient of existence). *Ījād* means "giving existence"; *wujūd* means "finding existence." (Trans.)

2 As mentioned above, the first sense of *amr* is synonymous with *shaʾn* (affair, status, case, issue, condition). The long string of words in brackets shows that *amr* translates differently based on context. It can be compared to the word "thing" which is general and vague enough to accommodate numerous possibilities. The first sense of *amr*, in light of its usage in the Qur'an, can best

To summarize: God's *amr* (command) means giving existence (*ījād*) instantaneously. His *amr* includes the existence which He gives to an entity in the first place, as well as the existence that He gives to its qualities and effects [which are subsequent to its essence]. God is in charge of not only the very essence of every being, but also how every being is structured and functions. Nothing is in possession of anything of itself.[1] God's *khalq* (creation) means giving existence (*ījād*) according to some measurement and composition. God's *khalq* is sometimes in the form of adding different parts together, as when the different components are put together to form the sperm, which then fertilizes the ovum, which then grows into a full human by feeding on nutrients from the body in proper conditions. And sometimes His *khalq* is not by piecing various parts together, as in the case of simple immaterial beings, where what is added to the being is not external components, but only the existential degree of the being, as well as the effects and functions of that being in its interaction with other existents. In other words, all beings are measured (*muqaddar*)[2] and

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be translated as "matter," in all its ambiguity. Nevertheless, the context always makes it very clear what "matter" is meant in the verse. The word is often used in the definite form—like "the matter" (*al-amr*), "God's matter" or "His matter" (*amrihi*, *amruhu*), or otherwise in the indefinite form—"a matter" or "some matter" (used with *tanwīn*)—but with sufficient contextual evidence that clarifies the import. In fact, the second sense of *amr* (command, order) can also be reduced to the first sense. The second sense is specifically applicable when the Qur'an attributes *amr* to God (*amr Allāh*). Given all of the usages of the term in the Qur'an, "God's *amr*" means "God's thing," which, based on the context, can mean "God's decree," "God's decision," "God's plan," "God's act" and so on. It is used equivocally in order to emphasize its ascription to God. Therefore, when the Qur'an says, "God's *amr*," "His *amr*" or "Our *amr*," it is not the word *amr* which is of primary significance, but the fact that it is something *from the divine*. This is the most apparent and the least contrived interpretation of the word *amr* as used in the Qur'an. A review of all usages of the term in the Qur'an would prove this and remove any doubts about it. In the current verse of discussion (7:54), the contradistinction between *khalq* and *amr* shows that they signify the origin of the universe and its continuation. That is, *amr* here means the direction of affairs (*tadbīr*), which is represented by the Throne, as the author has pointed out. (Trans.)

1 That is, nothing is self-sufficient in the world of creation, whether in terms of its being or in terms of its doings. (Trans.)

2 *Muqaddar* here means "defined, delineated and determined." (Trans.)

created (*makhlūq*) by God, whether they are the most primary principles in existence [that is, simple immaterial beings] or compound [material] beings. God says: *and He created everything and determined it in a precise measure* (25:2); *He who gave everything its creation and then guided it* (20:50); *Allah is the Creator of all things* (6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62). These verses show that God's *khalq* (creation) includes and applies to *everything*.

In other words, *khalq* means giving existence to something according to some plan, measure and order, whether that thing can be differentiated into separate parts [as in the case of compound material beings] or not [as in the case of simple immaterial beings]. This is contrary to *amr*, which is existentiation without the aspect of *taqdīr* (measurement, design, arrangement). This subtle point is the source of two differences in the Qur'anic usages of the words *khalq* and *amr*: (1) *Khalq* is sometimes gradual, as the Qur'an says: *Who created the heavens and the earth in six days* (7:54). However, *amr* is not gradual: *And Our command is but a single [word], like the twinkling of an eye* (54:50). (2) *Khalq* is sometimes attributed to other beings than God, as He says [addressing Prophet Jesus]: *when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it* (5:110); and He also says: *So blessed is Allah, the best of creators* (23:14). However, *amr*, in this sense [of bringing something to existence] is never attributed to other beings, but is reserved exclusively for God.

Amr is what functions between God and the thing which He wills to exist, like the spirit which is a means by which the body lives. Reflect on these verses: *the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] subservient by His command* (bi-amrihi) (7:54); *that the ships may sail by His command* (bi-amrihi) (30:46); *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command* (bi-amrihi) (16:2); *and they act by His command* (bi-amrihi) (21:27). There are many other verses similar to those, where a certain phenomenon occurs "by His command" (*bi-amrihi*). The letter *bā'* (by) in these verses indicate either causality (*sababiyyah*) or company (*muṣāḥabah*).[1]

In short, *khalq* (creation) and *amr* (command) are two considerations

1 Based on *sababiyyah*, the meaning would be: "The event occurs *because of* God's command, or *through* His command." Based on *muṣāḥabah*, the meaning would be: "The event occurs *with* God's command"; that is, "It occurs while it is in company of God's command." Both reduce to the same meaning effectively: "God's command (*amr*) is what brings the event to existence." (Trans.)

of the same essential meaning [of existentiation]. *Khalq* is a stage of creation which is subsequent to some *taqdīr* (measurement, determination, design, arrangement). Therefore, it best applies to the creation of the very essence of the beings, because the process of giving existence to an essence involves the determination of its features and effects. *Amr*, on the other hand, best applies to the creation and management of the features and effects of the beings, and the general system of causes and effects through which they interact with one another, all of which is subsequent to the creation of their essences. This distinction is applicable when both terms are used together. Otherwise, if they are used independently, each term may be used for all stages of existence, whether it involves measurement (*taqdīr*) or not. The reader should reflect on this.

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… All creation and command belong to Him…: Since the verse here talks about two things—creation (*khalq*) and command (*amr*), separated by the conjunction "and"—it suggests that the two are distinct from one another. As we explained above, *khalq* refers to giving existence to the very essence of the beings, while *amr* refers to giving existence to the effects of the beings and the order of their interactions. The two stages of God's creation and command can be mapped onto two statements at the beginning of the verse: (1) *Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days* (7:54). This refers to the creation of the essence of the beings [which is gradual and based on a plan]. (2) *Then He settled on the Throne. He draws the night's cover over the day…* (7:54). This refers to the arrangement and ordainment of a perfect system which puts the different aspects and affairs of the beings into an ordered chain. Therefore, the two stages of existentiation can also be inferred from the first part of the verse.[1]

Objection: Using the conjunction "and" does not necessarily imply a distinction between the two sides of conjunction. Otherwise, we should

1 In the original text of *al-Mīzān*, the author's quote here is a mix of verses 7:54 and 10:3, which seems to be a mistake. Verse 10:3 provides a more explicit expression of the two stages of creation and command: *Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then settled on the Throne, directing the command*. (Trans.)

conclude that Gabriel is not one of the angels based on the verse: *Whoever is an enemy of Allah, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel* (2:98).

Response: What is meant is that there must be *some* distinction in one way or another, which could be a matter of consideration and perspective. Otherwise, it is wrong to use a conjunction between something and itself [where the two sides of conjunction are identical, without any sense of otherness whatsoever], such as: "Zayd and Zayd came" or "I saw ʿAmr and ʿAmr." In the case of Gabriel, even though he is one of the angels, he differs from them in terms of his lofty position, power, and nearness to the Lord of the Throne [81:20].

… *Blessed is* (tabāraka, from barakah) *Allah, the Lord of all nations:* That is, He is possessor of abundant good (*barakah*) which He descends upon those whom He sustains, which includes everyone in all worlds. That is because He is their *rabb* (lord, sustainer, nourisher, director).

Discussion on the Meaning of God's Throne

Muslim scholars have a wide range of views concerning God's Throne (*ʿarsh*), the meaning of *then He settled on the Throne* (7:54), and other similar verses. Most earlier scholars[1] have held that verses like these are among the *mutashābih* (ambiguous) verses of the Qur'an, meaning that we should keep silent about their interpretation and defer knowledge of them to God. They consider it to be unlawful innovation (*bidʿah*) in religion if one investigates about the deeper realities of religion and tries to discover the facts that lie beyond the apparent text of the Qur'an and the sunnah. This view, however, is contrary to the rule of reason; nor is it approved of by the Qur'an and the sunnah. The verses of the Qur'an encourage the readers in the most emphatic ways to exert themselves in order to complete their knowledge about God and His *āyāt* (signs, verses, communications, revelations) through remembrance, contemplation and reflection. The Qur'an constantly leads the audience toward further contemplation by presenting them with rational arguments. The sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet also confirms this through a wide range of narrations which

1 There is no clear dividing line to define "earlier" versus "later" scholars. It is a relative classification which depends on the author who uses it. In case of the ʿAllāmah's exegetical discussions, we can approximately consider anyone living after the 17th century CE (11th century AH) to be among the "later scholars," and those living before that as the "earlier scholars." (Trans.)

can be considered as mass-transmitted in terms of their overall meaning (*mutawātir al-maʿná*).

It does not make sense to endorse a premise but prohibit the conclusion which follows from that. These scholars forbid studying the underlying realities of the Qur'an and the sunnah—even a theological study which admits the apparent doctrines of Islam according to the understanding of the public, and which tries to defend these doctrines by employing principles that are widely accepted among the believers. They categorically classify all such discussions as innovation in religion. We shall not concern ourselves with this group. We leave them with their mentality.

As with those who have discussed the topic, they have offered a variety of interpretations for God's Throne (*ʿarsh*). Here we present and examine three views:

(1) What is meant is the apparent meaning of the term. *ʿArsh* is a physical object that looks like a couch with legs. It is placed on top of the seventh heaven, and God (Who is far exalted from what the wrongdoers say) firmly sits on it as a king firmly seat himself on his throne.

Comment: This is the view of the *mushabbihah* (anthropomorphists) among Muslims. However, it is against the Qur'an, the sunnah, and reason, all of which agree that the Lord of the universe is clear of being analogous to His creation, whether in terms of His essence, His attributes, or His actions. He is glorified and exalted above anthropomorphism. It should also be noted that most advocates of the above view have considered *ʿarsh* (Throne) and *kursī* (Pedestal) to be the same thing.

(2) *ʿArsh* is the ninth celestial sphere which envelopes the entire physical world. It is also called *muḥaddid al-jihāt* (determinant of physical directions), and *falak al-aṭlas*, which is devoid of stars. The daily rotation of this sphere is what gives rise to time. Right under its inner layer is the *kursī*, which is the eighth sphere, where the fixed stars are located (called *falak al-thawābit*). Then underneath that are the seven firmaments which belong to the seven [visible] planets, where each higher sphere encompasses the sphere beneath it. The seven planets are in the descending order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and Moon.

Comment: This view is according to the Ptolemaic astronomy which offers a system for the movements of the heavenly bodies that are visible to our senses. Proponents of this view have matched what is mentioned in the Qur'an—such as the seven heavens, *kursī* and *ʿarsh*—with this system.

As long as they find no contradiction with the apparent text of the Qur'an, they adopt the principles of Hellenic physics and astronomy. For the parts that are contrary to the apparent meaning of the Book, they reject them. Some examples of these contradictory principles of Greek teachings are: (i) Beyond the ninth sphere there is nothing, neither vacuum nor matter. (ii) The rotation of the firmaments is eternal. (iii) It is impossible to tear and stitch the spheres (called *kharq wa iltiyām*). (iv) Every sphere is in direct contact with the other sphere [above or below it] without any distance or occupants between them. (v) The spheres are all of the same simple matter, and there is no hole or door in them.

These are contrary to the apparent text of the Qur'an and hadith, which say: (i) Beyond the Throne there are veils and curtains. (ii) The Throne has supporting poles and bearers [69:17]. (iii) God *shall roll up the sky, like the rolling of the scrolls for writings* [21:104]. (iv) There are angels which reside in the heavens. Even the narrowest strip there is filled with an angel that is either bowing or prostrating [to God].[1] They penetrate the heavens, descend from it, and ascend to it. (v) Heavens have gates [7:40]. (vi) Paradise is in the heavens, at *sidrat al-muntahá* (the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary) [53:14], where the actions of people are taken at the end.

There are more points which apparently contradict the ancient theories of physics and metaphysics. Thus Muslim scholars who have held that the heavens, *kursī* and *ʿarsh* correspond to the nine spheres have rejected the above-mentioned principles because of their contradiction with the apparent text of the Qur'an and hadith. Yet, these fundamental contradictions could not make them realize that what the Qur'an presents is a completely different system than what they have assumed. Later on, with the advent of new scientific discoveries based on solid empirical data, the previous theories were flatly falsified, so these Muslim scholars had no choice but to abandon their comparison.

(3) *ʿArsh* does not represent an external object, but it is meant metaphorically. When the Qur'an says: *then He settled on the Throne* (7:54) or *the All-Merciful, settled on the Throne* (20:5), it refers to God's dominion and authority over the world of creation. It is rather common in Arabic to use *istiwāʾ* (settlement, establishment) on something for *istīlāʾ* (dominion,

1 This is taken directly from Sermon 91 of *Nahj al-balāghah*, known as al-Ashbāḥ. (Trans.)

authority, rule) over the thing. For example, there is a poem which says:

قَدِ اسْتَوَى بِشْرٌ عَلَى الْعِرَاقِ مِنْ غَيْرِ سَيْفٍ وَ دَمٍ مُهْرَاقِ

Bishr was established (*istawá*) in Iraq, on his bed,
While no sword was drawn, and no blood was shed.[1]

Alternatively, *istiwā*ʾ (lit. sitting straight and firmly) on the throne indicates the commencement of directing the affairs. This metaphor is based on the image that when the kings want to give orders, govern their nation, and run the country, they ensconce themselves in their royal seats.

Either way—whether sitting on the throne marks the start of directing the affairs, or having control over the universe—it is a change of state and a shift of position, while God is clear from any change or alteration. This is true about anything that indicates a sense of transformation and movement. No aspect of transition is applicable to God. In all such cases, what undergoes change is the recipient. It is about some being which comes to existence, and this event is expressed through a verb [which indicates a temporal occurrence]. The verb is attributed to God since He is one end of it. It means that His mercy was applied to the thing which was originated. This is similar to other verbs used for God, as we say: "God created so-on-so"; "He gave life to so-and-so"; "He took the life of so-and-so"; "He provided sustenance for so-and-so."

Comment: It is true that the wording used here—*then He settled on the Throne* (7:54)—is meant metaphorically, but the question is: Is there some *reality* indicated by this figure of speech? When we talk about authority, dominion, kingdom, rule, leadership, governance, mastership and other similar concepts, they all indicate conventional positions which we have set up to facilitate our interactions. They are rooted in social contracts that we have set up and assumed. They do not have an external reality except for their consequences which appear in the real world. We have discussed this point repeatedly in our discussion of conventional matters (*iʿtibāriyyāt*). While religious texts employ the same language that we use to describe our social conventions, they are not limited to mental constructions. There

1 This is narrated from a famous Christian poet named al-Akhṭal (d. 90 AH, 709 CE), concerning Bishr b. Marwān, the brother of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. (Trans.)

are external realities which correspond to these terms when used by God.

When concepts like kingdom, authority, dominion and supervision are used for God, they have the same meaning as when they are used in the human world, but their applications differ. In the case of God, they represent a real quality or relationship in the world of existence which befits the divine; but in the case of us, their applications are mental constructs and conventional positions which exist only conceptually. We devise these concepts and positions in order to enforce their nominal implications. For instance, when we call someone a "head" (*raʾīs*), we do so in order to indicate that others—whom we call "those who are headed" (sing. *marʾūs*)—should follow his discretion and decision. It is not meant in a real sense; the person is not literally their head, and they are not bodies for that head. Similarly, when we call someone a "member" of a board or society, it does not mean that he is *really* a hand, a leg, a liver or a lung. What is meant is that the person is in charge of certain affairs in this group, in a way that is analogous to how each member of the body takes care of a certain affair.

God calls this "diversion and play" (*lahw wa laʿib*), where He says: *The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play* (29:64). Worldly objectives—such as beauty, wealth, children, priority, power and position—are nothing but conceptual labels that are only to be found in the mind. If we engage ourselves with these things for any reason other than the pursuit of an eternal goal in the hereafter, then we are occupying ourselves with illusory matters and imaginary forms. Competing with others in order to acquire such positions is just like the contests of children where they try to win the game in which they are so immersed. The result is only a fanciful pleasure in one's imagination, not extending beyond. It does not correspond to anything in the real world and has no real external effect.

When God calls the life of this world "a play" and criticizes it for consisting of merely mental positions, how could He be the first of the "players" Himself?! He is far exalted from that.

Therefore, when God says: *then He settled on the Throne* (7:54), it is a simile that expresses God's authority over His kingdom and His regulation of the affairs. At the same time, this expression represents a level of reality [called the Throne] where the rein of all affairs—despite all their variety and multiplicity—is held and controlled. The same can be inferred from other verses which mention the Throne and ascribe it to God, such as: *and*

He is the Lord of the Great Throne (9:129); *Those who bear the Throne, and those around it* (40:7); *and the Throne of your Lord will be borne that day by eight [angels]* (69:17); *the angels surrounding the Throne* (39:75). As we can see, these verses apparently suggest that the Throne is a reality which exists in the external world of existence. That is why we say that the Throne in this verse—*then He settled on the Throne* (7:54)—has a corresponding instance in the outside world. It is not merely a figure of speech that is limited to the simile in the verse. In this sense, the case of Throne in this verse is different from many other similes and analogies mentioned in the Qur'an. For instance, in the Verse of Light [24:35], we do not claim that there is *really* a divine glass, a divine olive tree, or divine olive oil in the world of existence, because these are only mentioned as part of the analogy [without extending beyond]. However, in the case of the Throne, the Tablet, the Pen and the Book [of decree], the verses suggest that they represent external realities. The reader should reflect on this.

The Throne that is mentioned in verses like this—*then He settled on the Throne* (7:54)—refers to a position in the world of existence where all events and affairs in the world are controlled, much like the office of a king, which is a centralized position for managing the affairs of his entire territory. We discussed this in detail in our exposition of the verse. This is confirmed by the verse: *then He settled on the Throne, directing the command. There is no intercessor, except by His leave* (10:3). In this verse, *directing the command* is an interpretive addition which clarifies the meaning of *then He settled on the Throne*. Thus the verse continues to say: *There is no intercessor, except by His leave*. The theme of this verse is to explain God's role in the world of existence and creation (*takwīn*) as Lord and Director. Therefore, what is meant by intercession (*shafāʿah*) in the verse is also *takwīnī* (creational, causal, existential) intercession, which is the same as the system of causality that is found in the universe. The causes and forces at work in the world are means and instruments which intermediate between God [as the absolute and ultimate cause] and the events and effects that occur in creation. For instance, God creates heat through the intermediation of fire. Likewise, He expands and melts objects through the intermediation of heat. The verse denies the causality of all things unless it is accompanied with God's leave. This is the same as God's unity as the Lord of the universe, which is stated at the beginning of the verse: *Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth* (10:3).

There is yet another point that is conveyed by the statement, *There is no intercessor, except by His leave* (10:3). It is saying that if a certain plan or arrangement is to be replaced by another plan, that replacement and the new plan will also occur with God's leave. What happens in intercession is that the intercessor mediates between God as the ruler, and the interceded side which is subject to God's rule. Through intercession, God's rule takes a new course and is applied through a different channel than before. For instance, the sun is an intercessor before God for the earth; its intercession serves the earth to receive light. Without the sun's intercession, God's rule—which works through the universal order of causes and effects—dictates that the earth would remain in darkness. The sun's intercession changes the initial divine decree of darkness to light. Similarly, if there is a barrier that blocks the light—like a roof or a veil—it would be a second intercessor which asks God to alter His previous decree, such that the sunlight does not shine on the ground directly.

In other words, an intercessor (*shafīʿ*) is a cause that changes a previous rule. The verse [10:3] is saying that the working of any such cause hinges on God's *idhn* (leave, permission). What this means is that anything that occurs in the world is part of God's universal plan, management and regulation of the world. There is no escape from His plan and order. So when we seek to find some means or devise an alternative in order to overcome a certain decree of God, change the way it unfolds, and escape the divine system of causes at work in the universe—whether through external forces and powers, or through our mental deliberations and plans—our very efforts, means and alternatives are also part of God's *tadbīr* (direction, management, regulation).

For instance, things of inferior quality "disobey" God's will and "refuse" to accept higher forms and blessings due to their limited receptive capacity. However, their very refusal of a certain stage of growth means their acceptance of another stage of growth, and both are from God. Similarly, people oppose their Lord out of their ignorance and refuse to submit to His grandeur. However, their very defiance [to a certain divine rule] is an act of compliance [to another divine rule, and to the entire system].[1] Thus when one plots anything, he is at the same time subject to

1 In other words, their "disobedience" is itself according to God's system of causes and effects in the world. They decline a certain channel of God's decree, but they adopt another channel, so they are still obedient to God's universal

God's plot, as He says: *Yet they do not plot except against their own souls, but they are not aware* (6:123); *yet they lead no one astray except themselves, but they are not aware* (3:69); *You cannot thwart [Allah] on the earth, and you do not have besides Allah any guardian or helper* (42:31).

The opposing forces and causes in the world can be compared to the two plates of a scale: they move in opposite directions and one always weighs down against the other, but with all their opposition they serve the same purpose of helping the owner measure the weight of an object. Hence, the statement *There is no intercessor, except by His leave* (10:3) means that any opposing cause that intercedes and intermediates between God's direction and its outcome is itself part of God's direction in another way—through the divine leave. The reader should reflect on this.

The verse in Sūrah Yūnus [10:3] conveys two points: (1) God alone is the sole Director of all events in the universe. A similar verse that expresses the same point is: *Then He settled on the Throne. You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor. Will you not then take admonition?* (32:4). (2) The Throne is a position of directing the affairs of the entire universe and governing the world of creation. The same idea can also be clearly observed in these verses: *[He is the] Lord of the Throne, the All-Glorious, Doer of what He desires* (85:15-16). Another similar verse is: *And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, celebrating the praise of their Lord, and judgment will be made between them with justice, and it will be said, "All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all nations!"* (39:75). The connection here is that the angels are the intermediate beings which carry God's rule, execute His commands, and follow His direction. These roles and functions are expressed by describing them as *surrounding the Throne*. Another similar verse is: *Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful* (40:7). In addition to mentioning the angels as being around the Throne, this verse says that there are some "bearers" of the Throne. This means that there must be some specific beings who sustain and support this lofty position, which is the source and locus of

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order. One can reject a specific rule of God only through another rule of His. All one can do is to change channels, but one cannot unsubscribe oneself from the entire plan altogether. One is always subject to God's decree, and any means that one seeks works under the same order. It only changes forms, but the essence is the same. (Trans.)

all divine directions [that is, the divine Throne]. There is another verse which also talks about this idea [of bearers of the Throne]: *and the Throne of your Lord will be borne that day by eight [angels]* (69:17).

Now, we said that the Throne is a position where all affairs of the world are gathered and concentrated. It is the center through which God acts as the Lord of the universe. This means that it must comprise of the image, form or blueprint of all events in the world, at least in an undifferentiated mode. Everything must be present to God and known to Him at that level. This idea is found in the verse: *Then He settled on the Throne. He knows whatever enters the earth and whatever emerges from it and whatever descends from the sky and whatever ascends to it, and He is with you wherever you may be, and Allah sees best what you do* (57:4). The subsequent elaboration here—*He knows whatever…*—is an interpretive addition which explains the meaning of God's settlement on the Throne. This means that the Throne is not only a station of divine direction of all affairs, but also a station of divine knowledge, because it encompasses all things in its scope.

Given the nature and definition of the Throne, we can also understand why it exists eternally. It will be there when the creation returns to God for the final judgment, as the Qur'an says: *And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne* (39:75). It also exists during the lifespan of this visible world, as mentioned in the verses which talk about the creation of the heavens and the earth [in six days]. It was also there in the stage prior to this creation, as mentioned in the verse: *It is He Who created the heavens and the earth in six days—and His Throne was [then] upon the waters* (11:7).

ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعاً وَ خُفْيَةً إِنَّهُ لا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾ وَ لا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ
بَعْدَ إِصْلاحِها وَ ادْعُوهُ خَوْفاً وَ طَمَعاً إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(7:55-56) ***Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly* (taḍarruʿan) *and secretly* (khufyah). *Indeed He does not like the transgressors. And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration, and supplicate Him with fear and hope: indeed Allah's mercy is close to the virtuous.***

Taḍarruʿ is "to express humiliation and servility." It is derived from *ḍarāʿah*, which means "weakness and abasement." *Khufyah* is "to be hidden and disguised." It is quite possible that *khufyah* also refers to humiliation

here, mentioned to emphasize *taḍarruᶜ*. The connection is that when one entreats with humility, he almost becomes hidden and unnoticeable due to his abasement and degradation [of himself].

The last verse—*Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created…* (7:54)—stated that God alone is the Lord of the worlds because He is the sole Creator of the world and the sole Director of its affairs. The current two verses serve as a conclusion to that. They order the audience to call God and be servants to Him. One must adopt a religion that is commensurate to God's Lordship: He is the sole Lord of the world, both at the level of creation and direction of its affairs.

Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly and* (wa) *secretly…: That is, one should supplicate God with humbleness and without raising their voice, for that would be against the manners of servitude. Praying loudly would be a transgression of the limits of servitude: *Indeed He does not like the transgressors*. This is assuming that the letter *wāw* means the conjunction "and," which shows that both conditions—*beseechingly and secretly*—must be met in supplications. Another possibility is that the letter *wāw* means the conjunction "or" (*aw*), which introduces an alternative. This means that one should supplicate God either beseechingly, which is normally aloud; or secretly, with a low voice. That is what servitude to God entails; and if one transgresses the limits of servitude: *Indeed He does not like the transgressors*.

Another possibility is: What is really meant by *beseechingly and secretly* is "loudly and quietly" (*jahr wa sirr*). The verse has replaced *taḍarruᶜ* (beseeching, entreaty, humiliation) for *jahr* to clarify that being loud in supplication is against the manners of servitude unless the person does so out of *taḍarruᶜ*.

And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration…: This command pertains to how people should deal with one another, whereas the last verse was about one's relationship with God (as one's Lord). The core message of religion with respect to human rights is that people should enhance their living conditions by eradicating injustice from amongst them, and dealing with each other in a way that helps them to have more *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint), whereby they can achieve happiness in this world and the next.

… and supplicate Him with fear and hope…: Humans have always sought to serve a lord and worship a god based on these two drives. Fear

and hope are two common ways which have led the people to arrive at religion throughout the history. Sometimes people would adopt and worship a god in order to be secure from its harm; and sometimes they would adopt and worship a god in order to reach some benefit through it. However, fear alone may lead one to despair and desolation, resulting in a total abandonment of worship; while hope alone may result in latitude and neglect with respect to the duties of servitude, again leading to a total abandonment of worship. There have been many cases of both. That is why God commands both of these by saying, *supplicate Him with fear and hope*, so that each of the two qualities would check and balance the other quality, and prevent its unwanted consequences. This maps to a more universal principle which governs the world of creation based on the two factors of attraction and repulsion.

***… indeed Allah's mercy* (raḥmah) *is close* (qarīb) *to the virtuous* (al-muḥsinīn, from iḥsān):** Here God defines the above-mentioned qualities—of balance in worship and refraining from corruption on the land after its restoration—as *iḥsān* (virtue, excellence, righteousness). The verse implies that those who respond to God's call are the virtuous, which is glad tidings to them, because it means that God's mercy is close to them.

While the word *raḥmah* (mercy) is feminine, the verses uses it with a masculine adjective *qarīb* (close) instead of its feminine form *qarībah*. There are three possible explanations for this: (1) *Raḥmah* is used as a *maṣdar* (verbal noun, gerund) here, which makes it gender-neutral and thus capable of taking both masculine and feminine adjectives. (2) Some have said that *raḥmah* denotes *iḥsān* in this verse, which is masculine. (3) *Qarīb* is based on the *faʿīl* verbal patterns, which is sometimes equivalent to *fāʿil* (active participial noun, nominative case) and sometimes to *mafʿūl* (passive participial noun, accusative case). In the case of *qarīb*, some have said that it is the latter, which makes it gender-neutral and thus capable of taking both masculine and feminine adjectives. A similar usage is seen in the verse: *What do you know—maybe the Hour is near* (42:17).[1]

وَ هُوَ الَّذِی یُرْسِلُ الرِّیاحَ بُشْراً بَیْنَ یَدَیْ رَحْمَتِهِ حَتَّی إِذا أَقَلَّتْ سَحاباً ثِقالاً سُقْناهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَیِّتٍ فَأَنْزَلْنا بِهِ الْماءَ فَأَخْرَجْنا بِهِ مِنْ کُلِّ الثَّمَراتِ کَذلِکَ نُخْرِجُ

1 In verse 42:17, "Hour" (*sāʿah*) is a feminine noun, used with the masculine adjective "near" (*qarīb*). (Trans.)

الْمَوْتٰى لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(7:57) ***It is He who sends forth the winds as harbingers*** **(bushran)** ***of His mercy. When they bear*** **(aqallat, from iqlāl)** ***[rain-]laden clouds*** **(saḥāban thiqālan)**, ***We drive them toward a dead land*** **(li-balad mayyit)** ***and send down water on it, and with it We bring forth all kinds of crops. Thus shall We raise the dead; maybe you will take admonition.***

This verse is also about God's Lordship, but specifically with respect to the return of creation to Him. What we read above was about God's Lordship with respect to the origin of creation: *Indeed your Lord is Allah…* (7:54).

The word *bushr* is originally *bushur*, which is the plural of *bashīr* (bearer of good news), much like *nudhur* which is the plural *nadhīr* (warner). "Mercy" in this verse means "rain." The verse literally says: "He sends forth the winds as bearers of good news before (*bayna yaday*) His mercy" [where the word "before" is omitted from the English translation]. What is meant by *bayna yaday* is "before, in front of, prior to." The verse involves a metaphorical expression, where rain is compared to someone who is away from his family, then a herald comes before him and gives them the good news that their awaited traveler is forthcoming.

Iqlāl is synonymous with *ḥaml* (to bear, to carry). *Saḥāb* means *ghamām* (cloud). A single cloud is called *saḥābah* or *ghamāmah*, just as a single date is called *tamrah*. Clouds are *thiqāl* (lit. heavy, loaded) in the sense that they carry the weight of rainwater. *Li-balad mayyit* can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "For the sake of a dead land" or "destined for a dead land," where the letter *lām* means *li-ajl*. (2) "Toward a dead land," where letter *lām* means *ilá* (to, toward). The rest of the verse should be clear.

The verse's argument is that the revival of the earth proves the possibility of the revival of the dead, because the two are of the same nature. This is based on the metaphysical principle that similar events (*amthāl*) follow the same rules of possibility and impossibility. Those who die do not vanish into non-existence altogether, because their souls are preserved, although their bodies disintegrate. This is similar to the plants, where the parts of them which remain on the ground wither, but their roots maintain their vegetative life. The plant remains without any growth, but it reclaims it active life later on. Thus God brings the dead back to life. The universal revivification of the dead on the Day of Resurrection is like the particular

revivification of the earth every year. There is more to add to this discussion, which we shall present in another place, if God wills.

وَ الْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَباتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَ الَّذِي خَبُثَ لا يَخْرُجُ إِلاَّ نَكِداً كَذلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ الْآياتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

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(7:58) ***The good land—its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely* (nakadan).** ***Thus do We paraphrase the signs variously for a people who give thanks.***

Nakad means *qalīl* (little, slight, scarce). Apart from the context, the verse itself resembles common proverbs which use the same imagery to state that good deeds and results issue from good sources, and evil deeds and results ensue from evil sources. In this sense, the verse can be compared to the sentence, *Even as He brought you forth in the beginning, so will you return* (7:29), which we discussed above. However, given the theme and context of the last verse, this verse would mean that the different shares of mercy that people receive is because of a difference on *their* end; otherwise, God's mercy is universal and unqualified.

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Examining Narrations

What we observe in the books of narration is that the Companions of the Prophet never provided any real discussion of concepts like *ʿarsh* (Throne) and *kursī* (Pedestal). Nor did they address deeper Qur'anic realities, even topics that pertain to God's oneness (*tawḥīd*). Instead, they were always content with the apparent meaning of religious teachings, and never explored beyond that. We see the same approach among their Followers (*tābiʿīn*) and the early exegetes. The following accounts illustrate this approach.

(1) It is narrated from Sufyān b. ʿUyaynah: The interpretation of any description of God in the Qur'an is only to recite it and remain silent about it.

(2) Once someone asked Imam Mālik, "O Abā ʿAbd-Allah. *He settled on the Throne* (7:54): How did He settle?"
The narrator says: I had never seen Mālik enraged at anything as he was incensed by this statement. He started sweating, and the audience [that is, his students] dropped their heads [in silence

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and contemplation]. When he recovered from that state, he said, "The how is unintelligible; His settlement is not unknown; believing in it is obligatory; asking about it is innovation in the religion (*bidʿah*); and I'm afraid that you are misguided." Thus he ordered the man to be taken out.

Author's comment: Apparently his answer is deduced from the following account.

(3) Concerning *the All-Merciful, settled on the Throne* (20:5), it is narrated from Umm Salamah: The how is unintelligible; [the meaning of] sitting is not unknown; accepting it is *īmān* (belief, faith); and denying it is *kufr* (disbelief, infidelity, heresy).[1]

Author's comment: This was their [the Companions' and the early scholars'] approach on this topics. We have not received anything from them except what is found in the words of Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants. Here we shall present some of what we find in their words.

(4) Part of Imam ʿAlī's response to al-Jāthlīq[2] was: Indeed the angels bear the Throne, but the Throne is not in the form of a couch, as you may assume. Rather, it is something that is limited, created, governed, and owned by your Lord. He is not *on it* as an object is placed on another object.[3]

(5) Al-Jāthlīq asked Imam ʿAlī, "Tell me about the Almighty God: Does He carry the Throne, or does the Throne carry Him?"
The Imam replied, "God is the bearer of the Throne, the heavens, the earth, and whatever is in them and between them. He says: *Indeed Allah sustains the heavens and the earth lest they should fall apart, and if they were to fall apart there is none who can sustain them except Him. Indeed He is All-Forbearing, All-Forgiving* (35:41)."
Al-Jāthlīq asked, "So how come He says: *and the Throne of your Lord will be borne that day by eight [angels]* (69:17)? Because you said He is the One Who bears the Throne, the heavens, and the earth."
Imam ʿAlī replied, "The Almighty God created the Throne from

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh and al-Lālikaʾī's *al-Sunnah*.

2 This was a title of the archbishop of Christians in Muslim lands. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Salmān al-Fārsī.

four lights: a red light which gives redness to the color red; a green light which gives greenness to the color green; a yellow light which gives yellowness to the color yellow; and a white light which gives whiteness to the color white.

That[1] is the knowledge which He has loaded upon the bearers. It is a light from the light of His glory. It is by His glory and light that the hearts of the believers see [the truth]. It is by His glory and light that the fools oppose Him. It is by His glory and light that everyone in the heavens and the earth—including all of His creatures—seek some means of nearness to Him through their different deeds and their varying religions. Hence, everything is carried; God carries everything with His light, glory and power. Nothing is in charge of its own harm, benefit, death, life or resurrection. Everything is carried, and the Almighty God maintains them [the heavens and the earth] lest they should fall apart [35:41], and He encompasses anything that is in them. He is the life of everything and the light of everything. *Immaculate is He, and greatly exalted above what they say* [17:43]."

Al-Jāthlīq asked, "Now tell me, *where* is God?"

Imam ᶜAlī said, "He is here and here, above and below, encompassing us and with us. He says: *There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth [companion], nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be* (58:7). God's *kursī* (Pedestal) encompasses the heavens, the earth, *whatever is between them, and whatever is under the ground. Whether you speak loudly [or in secret tones] He indeed knows the secret and what is still more hidden* (20:6-7). Thus He says: *His seat* (kursī) *embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not wearied by their preservation, and He is the All-Exalted, the All-Supreme* (2:255).

Those who bear the Throne are the scholars that God has loaded His knowledge upon them. Nothing of what He has created in His kingdom (*malakūt*) is outside of these four [lights]. That is the kingdom which God has shown His chosen servants. That is what He showed His friend (*khalīl*): *Thus did We show Abraham*

1 "That" refers to "the Throne" in verse 69:17. The author explains what this means below. (Trans.)

the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude (6:75). How could the carriers of the Throne carry God when it is by *His* light that their hearts live, and it is by *His* light that they are guided to His knowledge!?…"[1]

Author's comment: We shall discuss a few segments of this hadith one by one:

(i) Al-Jāthlīq's question—"Does He carry the Throne, or does the Throne carry Him?"—shows that he was thinking in physical terms. He supposed this *ḥaml* (bearing, carrying, carriage) to be as a physical body bears the load of another physical body. The Imam's answer—that "God is the bearer of the Throne, the heavens, the earth…"—analyzes and interprets *ḥaml* as carrying the very *existence* of something. God supports the existence of all things. Everything completely depends on Him, without any existence of itself. Based on this definition [of *ḥaml*], it should be clear that other beings are borne by God, not that they bear Him.

(ii) That is why al-Jāthlīq moved on to ask the Imam about the verse: *and the Throne of your Lord will be borne that day by eight [angels]* (69:17). The above definition of *ḥaml* [in the existential sense] is restricted to God, but this verse ascribes *ḥaml* to other than Him. Here the Imam provided a second interpretation for *ḥaml*: bearing God's knowledge. In other words, he interpreted the Throne as knowledge.[2]

The Imam then continued to clarify the apparent contradiction between the two interpretations. He explained that what is meant by knowledge here is not the ordinary sense of knowledge, which is acquired, conceptual and mediate (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuṣūlī*). Rather, it signifies the light of God's glory and power, which is shown to the bearers of the Throne to witness through presential and immediate knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*). This knowledge [which is the same as the Throne] is borne by these bearers, while at the same time it is borne by God. There is no contradiction between the two, much like the case of our acts: our acts are present with us, which means that we carry them; but at the same time they are present with God, which means that He carries them. Ultimately, He is the true owner of our acts, Who has then given us ownership over them [as His deputies, extensions or expressions].

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of al-Barqī, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

2 That is, in verse 69:17, Throne means God's knowledge of other beings. (Trans.)

In other words, God's Throne which encompasses everything is the same as the light of God's glory and power, which brings everything into manifestation. Hence the Throne represents God's kingdom over everything below it. God is the One Who carries this light, but He has also unveiled it to certain beings to witness it. Thus they are also carriers of this light with His leave [not independently]. God is the bearer of both the bearer and the borne.

This means that there are two meanings for the Throne: (1) In the verse, *then He settled on the Throne* (7:54), the Throne—or settling on the Throne—means God's kingdom and dominion. (2) In the verse, *and the Throne of your Lord will be borne…* (69:17), the Throne means God's knowledge. These are in fact one and the same, because they refer to the divine position from which all things appear, and where all the particular and detailed affairs of the world of existence are governed in an undifferentiated manner. It is the station of divine dominion and direction of affairs, as well as the station of divine knowledge which shines light on all beings.

(iii) "It is by His glory and light that the hearts of the believers see…" This part of the hadith shows that the Throne is a station which outlines the system which governs the life and evolution of all beings. It determines the path which the community of the believers will pursue in their journey toward God. It is also the source of the order which brings doom to wretched people and covers those who are ignorant of their Lord's majesty. Overall, the system of laws which governs all beings in the universe is rooted in this station called the Throne. That is the system through which all individuals move toward their Lord through their actions and customs, whether they know what means of proximity they should seek or not.

(iv) "He is the life of everything and the light of everything": This sentence explains and justifies what the Imam said earlier: "Hence, everything is carried; God carries everything…" The effective meaning is: God is the source of existence of everything, and His knowledge encompasses them all. Thus He manifests for everything the specific path that it should pursue in its existential journey. He illuminates the darkness of the path for the traveler on the path through His light. That is why nothing possesses anything of itself, but God is the owner of all things and the bearer of their existence.

(v) "He is here and here, above and below…" Since God supports,

sustains and bears the existence of all things, no place is empty of Him, while no place includes Him more than any other place either. When it is said that "God is in a certain place" or that "He is with something" where that thing is bound by location, what is meant is that He sustains, bears and encompasses the existence of that thing and place, which is equally true about any other being and place as well. This reduces to God's active knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-fiʿlī*) of all things, which means that all things are present to Him without any veil. That is why the Imam said: "God's *kursī* (Pedestal) encompasses the heavens, the earth, *whatever is between them, and whatever is under the ground* (20:6)." This refers to God's existential encompassment of all things (*iḥātah*). Then the Imam linked this to His knowledge of all things: "*Whether you speak loudly [or in secret tones] He indeed knows the secret and what is still more hidden* (20:7)." This means that the *kursī*—which is used here synonymously with *ʿarsh* (Throne)—represents two stations of the divine: (1) His encompassment, direction and maintenance [of the world of existence]; and (2) His presential, direct and immediate knowledge [of all things]. The Imam then matched this with the verse: *His seat* (kursī) *embraces the heavens and the earth…* (2:255).

(vi) "Nothing of what has created in His kingdom is outside of these four": This apparently refers to the four colors that were mentioned at the beginning of the hadith. We shall discuss this further when we examine the narrations about the [Prophet's] ascension (*miʿrāj*).[1]

(vii) "And that is the kingdom which God has shown His chosen servants." This means that the Throne is the same as God's *malakūt* (kingdom, dominion, sovereignty). *Malakūt* is classified into the higher *malakūt* (called *aʿlá*) and the lower *malakūt* (called *asfal*). The Throne is a position of concision, before the differentiation of the particulars. It is the inward gate out of the two gates, as we shall see in the next hadith. Therefore, it is better to interpret it as the higher *malakūt*.

(viii) "How could the carriers of the Throne carry God…?" This reiterates and emphasizes what was mentioned at the beginning of the hadith—that the Throne is the divine station of bearing and supporting the existence of all things. Therefore, the bearers of the Throne cannot be God's bearers, but are themselves borne by Him. How could it be otherwise when they utterly depend on Him—in their very existence and their subsequent existential progress?

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1 See the author's discussion of narrations under verses 17:1 and 53:1-18. (Trans.)

(ix) "It is by *His* light that their hearts live, and it is by *His* light that they are guided to His knowledge." Here "their hearts" refers to their existence, and "their guiding light" refers to their existential perfection. "Heart" and "light" are used here in accordance with the Throne representing the station of divine knowledge.

(6) Ḥannan b. Sadīr says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about *ʿarsh* (Throne) and *kursī* (Pedestal). He said: "The Throne has many different qualities. Whenever the Qur'an uses this term, it mentions the quality which pertains to that context. For instance, *the Lord of the Great Throne* (9:129, 23:86, 27:26) means 'the Lord of the Great kingdom (*mulk*)'; and *the All-Merciful, settled on the Throne* (20:5) means 'He has enveloped the kingdom (*ʿalá al-mulk ihtawá*).' This is God's knowledge about the modality and quality (*kayfūfiyyah*) of all things.

When used in conjunction, *ʿarsh* is distinct from *kursī*. They are two of the greatest gates of the unseen. They are both part of the unseen, and are linked to one another. *Kursī* is the outward gate of the unseen: it is the starting point of all original things, and all beings emanate from it. *ʿArsh* is the inward gate which comprises of the knowledge of quality, existence, measure, limit, place, decree, quality of will, terms, movements, abstention, origin and return.[1] They are two gates of knowledge, where one is a counterpart of another. The *mulk* (kingdom, dominion, sovereignty) of *ʿarsh* is different from the *mulk* of *kursī*, and the knowledge of *ʿarsh* is more comprehensive than the knowledge of *kursī*. That is why God says, *the Lord of the Great Throne* (9:129, 23:86, 27:26). The adjective 'great' here shows that the *ʿarsh* is greater than the *kursī*. Nevertheless, they are linked to one another."

I asked: "May I be your ransom! Why is the *ʿarsh* placed at the same level as the *kursī* in terms of merit?"

"The two are adjacent," the Imam explained, "because one [the *ʿarsh*] comprises of the knowledge of modality and quality [of all things]; and the other [the *kursī*] comprises of the outward gates of origination, position, and the outline of the expansion and contraction [of all things]. Thus they are adjacent to one another; one conveys the meaning of the other interchangeably.

1 The author explains these terms below. (Trans.)

> This is like when the scholars express their arguments in different words to prove their claim. That is because: *He singles out for His mercy whomever He wills* [2:105, 3:74] *and He is the All-Strong, the All-Mighty* [42:19]."[1]

Author's comment: We shall discuss a few points from this hadith one by one:

(i) "The Throne has many different qualities…" This supports what we said in the exposition of the verse, that God's *istiwāʾ* (settlement, establishment, sitting) shows that God holds the rein of directing all affairs of the universe. The same idea is confirmed at the end of the hadith, where the Imam says: "This is like when the scholars express their arguments in different words."

(ii) "This is God's knowledge about the modality and quality (*kayfūfiyyah*) of all things." What is meant here is knowledge of the higher causes that give existence to things. There are two common usages for the word *kayf* (lit. how): (1) Sometimes it is used to inquire about the quality of something. This is classified as an accident (*ʿaraḍī*) in metaphysics. (2) Sometimes it is used to ask about the cause or reason for something, as one would ask, "How did this happen?" or "How did Zayd do this when he did not have the means to do it?"

(iii) "When used in conjunction, *ʿarsh* is distinct from *kursī*…" That is: *ʿArsh* and *kursī* are the same in the sense that they represent a station in the unseen realm, from which the beings manifest and descend into this world. However, when used together in one sentence, they convey different meanings because that station itself divides into two aspects. It consists of two gates which are not wholly distinct since they mirror one another. There is an outward gate which opens to our [visible] world, and there is an inward door which is behind it. The Imam explained this by saying: "*Kursī* is the outward gate of the unseen…"

(iv) "*Kursī* is the outward gate of the unseen: it is the starting point of all original things (*al-bidaʿ*), and all beings emanate from it." What is meant by *bidaʿ* is beings without a previous model or example. "All beings emanate from it" because all beings have an original creation; they are not a replica of a previous version. An event would be *badīʿ* (original, wondrous) if its occurrence is unanticipated based on the conditions which gave rise to the events prior to it. In other words, an event comes

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration.

and replaces what was previously expected to occur. This means that origination (*ibdāʾ*) reduces to *badāʾ* (alteration, apparent change of the course of events), where God cancels the effect of one cause and replaces it with another.

Therefore, all events that occur in this world—which emanate from the working of opposing causes and varying forces—are original events. They are results of an alteration or a new course of the divine will (called *badāʾ*). Yet, above the opposing causes and varying wills which constantly conflict with one another, there is a single cause and will which governs them all. It is the effect of that cause and will which always occurs. That [governing cause and overriding will] is what cancels one cause with another, changes what a setting entails by introducing something new, and restricts the impact of every force with something else. Imagine a traveler who decides to move on a path toward a certain destination. He launches on his journey, but after moving for a while he may stop to rest a bit. His act of stopping opposes his act of moving, and the decision to stop cancels the decision to move. However, both of them are subject to a higher will which governs them and arranges when to give priority to which. Each of these two wills—that is, the will to move and the will to stop—has its own function, which is the opposite of the other. Yet, they are both compliant to the will above them. They agree with each other in executing what the higher cause dictates to them.[1]

Hence, we have two levels here: (1) the stage where the different causes become distinct from one another and start opposing each other; (2) the stage where all causes are united together in harmony. The former corresponds to the *kursī*, and the latter corresponds to the *ʿarsh*. Evidently

1 The author's discussion here pertains to the realm of temporal events, where one cause may come after another and cancel its effect. At a higher level of discussion, we can say that all of God's creation—including the dimension of time and the non-temporal realms—is a single whole which is a manifestation of God without a previous example. That is what makes the world of existence original (*badīʿ*). The hadith also talks about original things coming from the *kursī*, which is the outward gate that opens from the unseen to the visible world. This suggests that they are original in their entirety because the temporal world as a whole is an original emanation from the *kursī*, not in the sense that each individual event is an example of *badāʾ* (alteration) within the temporal world. (Trans.)

ʿ*arsh* takes precedence over *kursī*.[1] Their difference is that of concision and differentiation, or hiddenness and appearance.

In fact, ʿ*arsh* and *kursī* are suitable matches for these two stations because of the specific qualities of a king's ʿ*arsh* and *kursī*. *Kursī* denotes the seat of a king's officers and agents who execute his commands. Each of them decides about a certain aspect of the nation based on their discretion. That is why sometimes one office or "chair" (*kursī*) comes into conflict with another, in which case one must be given priority over the other. That is where one directive abrogates another (called *naskh*). Nevertheless, all offices are unanimous in obeying the commands of the royal throne (ʿ*arsh*) which is the highest authority. The king's ruler is secure from the level of conflicting forces, and is never abrogated by the lower offices and agents. The king's throne includes an inward, hidden and undifferentiated form of all the details that shall appear through the hands of the lower offices and agents.[2]

This should clarify the meaning of "*Kursī* is the outward gate of the unseen." "It is the starting point of all original things": This refers to the creation of beings and events without a previous like. "And all beings emanate from it": This refers to the details of creation and the wide range of particulars.

(v) "ʿ*Arsh* is the inward gate": as opposed to *kursī*, which is the outward gate. The former represents the stage of hiddenness, and the latter represents the state of appearance. They differ in terms of how differentiated and particularized are the laws which issue from them.

(vi) "ʿ*Arsh*… comprises of the knowledge of…": That is, it comprises of every kind of knowledge. It includes a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of all particulars in a concise and undifferentiated form.

(vii) "The knowledge of quality (*kayf*), existence (*kawn*), measure (*qadr*), limit (*ḥadd*), place (*ayn*), decree (*mashiyyah*), quality of will (*ṣifat al-irādah*), terms (*alfāẓ*), movements (*ḥarakāt*), withdrawal (*tark*), origin and return." Apparently *kayf* (quality, lit. how) here refers to how things

1 This is existential precedence, in the arc of descent of the creation. (Trans.)

2 The literal definition and usage of the terms would also confirm this. ʿ*Arsh* (throne) means a large, elegant and elevated couch. Typically, it is exclusively used for the highest authority in a nation—the king. *Kursī* is used for more ordinary chairs and has a wider range of applications, which includes the seat of lower officers and regional rulers. (Trans.)

come to existence, which means the existential causes of things. *Kawn* (existence, creation) means the entire being (*wujūd*) of things. "Origin and return" refer to the beginning of the existence of things and their end. *Qadr* (measure) and *ḥadd* (limit) are synonymous, with the difference that *qadr* signifies the absolute size of something in and of itself, while *ḥadd* refers to the relative boundaries of something, which prevent external elements from entering its territory and mixing with it. *Ayn* (place, location, position) means the spatial property of an object. *Mashiyyah* (decree, providence, will, volition) and *ṣifat al-irādah* (quality of will, property of volition) are the same thing. It could be that the former refers to will in general, while the latter refers to a specific will [after it is determined and particularized].

"Knowledge of terms" is the knowledge of how terms (*alfāẓ*) signify meanings and how they relate to the external world by nature (*ṭabʿ*), because even the conventional significance of terms trace back to a natural root. "Knowledge of *ḥarakāt* (movements, motions) and *tark* (withdrawal, abstention, abandonment)" refers to the relationship between one's essence and the acts that one commits or abstains from. It could also be that these three points—"knowledge of terms, movements and withdrawals"—together refer to knowing about how commands and prohibitions are mentally abstracted and constructed from external actions and inactions. That means the knowledge of how words stem from realities that are all rooted in the same source.[1] *Tark* means "relative stillness as opposed to movement."

(viii) "Because one comprises of the knowledge of modality and quality": This refers to the *ʿarsh* (Throne). "And the other comprises of the outward gates of *badāʾ* (origination, lit. appearance)": This refers to the *kursī* (Pedestal). *Badāʾ* (alteration) means "the appearance of one cause on top of another, where the second cause cancels the effect of the first."[2] This is

1 This is a rather mysterious idea, which the author has not elaborated any further. It is reminiscent of what Sri Aurobindo calls "the soul of the body of sound." See his discussion in *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 289.

2 This is a technical definition of *badāʾ* as discussed in Shia theology and mentioned in narrations from the Imams. *Badāʾ* can also be interpreted in its common and non-technical sense as the initial creation and appearance of things. (Trans.)

applicable to all different causes and forces at work in the universe [in the sense that there is a persistent interaction and interference between them].

(ix) "Thus they are adjacent to one another; one conveys the meaning of the other interchangeably." The hadith describes *ʿarsh* and *kursī* as "compatible neighbors." In fact, they are really of the same reality, and their difference is only in terms of concision [in the case of *ʿarsh*] and differentiation [in the case of *kursī*] (*ijmāl wa tafṣīl*). The narration literally says, "one of them *carries* the other in *ṣarf*," which means that "carrying" is used as a figure of speech, or as an alternative expression. Indeed, the scholars illustrate subtle and intricate teachings through analogies and examples: "This is how the scholars use various expressions."[1]

(x) "And [this expression is used] so that the scholars may deduce the proof for what is claimed about the two." "The two" are the *ʿarsh* and the *kursī*. The meaning is: "This way of expression [that one carries the other] is used so that the scholars may verify the truth of the teachings that they receive through revelation. This way they can discern how God's direction of the affairs of the world issues through the two stations of concision and differentiation, or hiddenness and appearance." The reader should reflect on this.

(7) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about the verse: *and His Throne was [then] upon the waters* (11:7). He said, "What do others say about it?"

He was told, "[They say that] The Throne was on waters and the Lord was on it."

The Imam said, "That is not true. Whoever supposes this, is saying that God is borne [by something else] and is describing God by the qualities of His creation. This entails that there is something stronger than God because there is something that bears Him."

Then he added, "[The verse means that] God carried His religion and knowledge on the waters—and that is before the existence of the heaven, the earth, the jinn, the humankind, the sun and the moon."[2]

Author's comment: This hadith is similar to the last in that it also interprets the Throne as knowledge. "Water" symbolizes the origin of

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1 This and the next part are based on the author's reading of the hadith, which differs slightly from my translation above. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration.

creation. That was the object of God's active knowledge before the beings appeared in their differentiated and particular forms.[1]

(8) Once Imam ʿAlī was asked about the distance between the earth and the Throne. He said: It is a servant's sincere utterance of "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*).[2]

Author's comment: This is a subtle reply from the Imam, which he deduced from the verse: *To Him ascends the good word, and He elevates righteous conduct* (35:10).

What is meant by this hadith is that if a servant denies the divinity of everything else, and exclusively ascribes divinity and independence in existence to God, then one will necessarily forget all other than Him. The sole focus and attention of such a servant will be completely directed at the station where everything depends on God, and that is the very station of the divine Throne, as we explained above.

A similarly subtle narration from the Imam is: "Once he was asked about the distance between the earth and the heaven. He replied, 'It is the distance that the eye can see, and the prayer of the oppressed.'"[3]

(9) Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked, "Why is the Kaʿbah called Kaʿbah?"

"Because it is a square (*mukaʿʿab*)."

"Why is it a square?"

"Because it represents al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr (the Frequented House), which is square."

"Why is al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr square?"

"Because it represents the Throne, which is square."

"Why is the Throne square?"

"Because the foundations of Islam are four words: (1) *subḥān*

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1 God's knowledge is classified into essential (*dhātī*) and active (*fiʿlī*). The former is His knowledge of His essence, irrespective of the existence or non-existence of other beings. The latter is His knowledge of His acts, where His actions (including everything that He has created) are known to Him by presential knowledge. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

3 The second part means that the prayer of the oppressed will reach the sky, meaning that it will be answered by God. The first part shows that the question could be meant either physically or spiritually. It implies that one (living at that time) should not seek anything more than this as a physical measure. All that aside, this is also worthy of reflection: "Is there really any distance between the earth and the heaven?" (Trans.)

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Allāh (glory be to God); (2) *al-ḥamd li-llāh* (praise be to God); (3) *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (there is no god but God); and (4) *Allāh akbar* (God is greater)."[1]

Author's comment: The first of these words is a description of God through negation [of privative qualities]. The second is a description of Him through affirmation [of positive qualities]. The third is a declaration of His oneness, which combines the previous two. The fourth is the highest stage of monotheism, which is exclusively found in Islam. It says that God is greater than all description, because every attribute necessitates some definition and qualification, while He is greater than being delimited by any limit or qualified by any qualification. We had a discussion on this under the verse: *Certainly they have disbelieved, those who say, "Allah is the third [person] of a trinity"…* (5:73).[2]

Overall, this hadith also reduces to the idea that the Throne is God's knowledge, as we explained. There is a wide variety of narrations to this effect. Here are three examples: (i) It is narrated that Āyat al-Kursī [2:255], the end of Sūrah al-Baqarah [2:284-286], and Sūrah al-Ḥamd are from the treasures of the Throne. (ii) It is narrated that Ṣād [the name of Chapter 38] is a spring which diffuses from a leg of the Throne. (iii) It is narrated that "the manifest horizon" (*al-ufuq al-mubīn*) [mentioned in verse 81:23] is a field right in front of the Throne, with rivers that are supplied by as many glasses as the stars [or rivers which fill as many glasses as the stars].

(10) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about the verse, *Nūn. By the Pen* (68:1). He said: God created the Pen (*qalam*) from a tree in paradise called al-Khuld (lit. the everlasting). Then He commanded a river in paradise, "Be ink!" Thus it solidified. It was whiter than snow and sweeter than honey. Then He commanded the Pen, "Write!"

The Pen inquired, "What shall I write, my Lord?"

"Write whatever has been and whatever shall be until the Day of Resurrection." The Pen wrote on a scroll that was whiter than silver and clearer than ruby (*yāqūt*). Then He rolled it and stored it in the base of the Throne. Then He sealed the mouth of the Pen, making it never speak thereafter. That is "the Hidden Book"

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1 Al-Ṣadūq's *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, *al-Majālīs* (*al-Amālī*) and *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*.

2 See volume 11, pp. 105ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

(*al-kitāb al-maknūn*), from which all books [of deeds and events] are copied…[1]

Author's comment: We shall present the rest of this hadith in Sūrah Nūn, if God wills. There are other narrations to this effect. In some of them, the narrator asks the Imam for further clarification and insists on it. Then the Imam explains, "The Pen (*qalam*) is an angel, and the Tablet (*lawḥ*) is an angel." This shows that what is stated in these narrations is a symbolic language, intended to make the meaning more tangible and comprehensible. They provide a concrete and physical representation of something that is abstract and immaterial.

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated from his father [Imam al-Bāqir], from his grandfather [Imam al-Sajjād]: "In the Throne there is an image of everything that God has created in the land or the sea." Then he [Imam al-Sajjād, or Imam al-Ṣādiq] said, "This is the *taʾwīl* (interpretation, underlying reality) of the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21)."[2]

Author's comment: What is meant by the *taʾwīl* of the verse is an underlying reality behind the expression of the verse.[3] That reality is the existence of the forms and images of all things in the Throne. We already explained what this means.[4] A similar idea is narrated concerning the meaning of the supplication, "O He Who exposes what is fair" (*yā man aẓhar al-jamīl*).

(12) In the same narration, the Imam [al-Sajjād or al-Ṣādiq] says:

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Aqṣar.

2 *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*.

3 This is based on the author's specific definition of *taʾwīl* based on its usage in the Qur'an, as discussed under verse 7:53 above and verse 3:7. See volume 5, pp. 63ff of the English translation. Meanwhile, *taʾwīl* is often used in a more general sense in the narrations from the Imams. They used *taʾwīl* interchangeably with *tafsīr* (interpretation), as commonly understood by the people. When a term has a conventional meaning that is widely understood and commonly used by the people, the Imams would employ it in the same sense primarily. In such cases, assuming and imposing the specific Qur'anic sense of the term entails an unnecessary restriction of meaning. (Trans.)

4 This, again, is the idea that the Throne is a station of God's eternal knowledge of all things in an undifferentiated form, before their appearance as particular and determined entities in the visible world. (Trans.)

> Between each legs of the Throne is a distance of a thousand years of flight by a fast-flying bird. Every day the Throne is covered with seventy thousand colors of light that no one of God's creatures can bear looking at. With respect to the Throne, all beings put together are like a single ring cast in a vast plain[1]

Author's comment: The last part is also narrated from the Prophet through both Shia and Sunni chains of transmission. This narration is again a symbolic expression [which should not be taken literally], much like many other narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt. One proof for this is that no matter how we calculate the greatness described here [based on the flight of a fast-flying bird], there are lightyear distances in the physical world which exceed that by several orders of magnitude [which would contradict the last part of the hadith]. Therefore, the Imam's description is rather meant to make an immaterial and transcendent meaning more tangible and immanent.

(13) Imam al-Riḍā said: The reason behind circumambulating the House [of God] pertains to when God *said to the angels, "Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth," they said, "Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood?"* (2:30). The angels realized that they sinned by challenging God. Filled with remorse, they took refuge in the Throne and asked forgiveness from God. That is how God loved His servants to worship Him, so He placed a house in the fourth heaven which maps onto the Throne, called al-Ḍurāḥ (the Distanced House). Then he placed a house in the lowest heaven which maps onto al-Ḍurāḥ, called al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr (the Frequented House). Then he placed the House [of Kaʿbah on the earth] which maps onto al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr, and ordered Adam to circumambulate it. Thus this [practice] was established in his descendants until the Day of Resurrection…[2]

Author's comment: There are certain peculiarities with this hadith which must be clarified:

i) Based on the interpretation of the Throne as God's knowledge, the meaning of the angel's recourse to the Throne is that they acknowledged

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1 *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sinān.

their ignorance and deferred the matter to God's knowledge. This is what the Qur'an says: *They said, "Immaculate are You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise"* (2:32). We discussed this story in Sūrah al-Baqarah.[1]

ii) The narration mentions two places in the heavens: al-Ḍurāḥ and al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr. However, most narrations only refer to al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr in the fourth heaven.

iii) The narration states that the angels sinned, whereas they are infallible according to the explicit text of the Qur'an.[2] Perhaps what is meant by "realizing their sin" is "realizing some deficiency and imperfection in themselves."

iv) Clearly what is meant by the Kaʿbah "mapping onto" al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr is a spiritual correspondence, not a physical one. This can be confirmed by the use of the same expression in describing the relation between al-Ḍurāḥ in the fourth heaven and the Throne. What we understand from the Qur'an and hadith is that the *ʿarsh* (Throne) and the *kursī* (Pedestal) encompass the heavens and the earth.[3] Based on this notion, it does not make sense to speak of physical *muḥādhāh* (mapping, parallelism, correspondence) if one object is completely encircled by another.

(14) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: One of the bearers of the Throne is in the form of a human; he asks God to provide for the children of Adam. A second bearer is in the form of a rooster; it asks God to provide for the birds. A third bearer is in the form of a lion; it asks God to provide for the predators. A fourth bearer is in the form of an ox; it asks God to provide for the cattle. The ox has lowered its head [in embarrassment] ever since the Children of Israel worshiped the calf. Upon the Day of Resurrection, their number will increase to eight [bearers].[4]

Author's comment: There are very many narrations similar to this. There is also one which mentions that there are four bearers for the *kursī* (Pedestal). That is the only narration—that I have come across—which

1 See volume 1, pp. 104ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 See verses 7:206, 16:49-50, 21:19-20, 21:26-27, 66:6. (Trans.)

3 What is meant by "the heavens and the earth" is the entire physical world, or perhaps also the immaterial realms and beings. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

says that the *kursī* has bearers as well. We presented it under Āyat al-Kursī in Sūrah al-Baqarah [2:255].[1]

(15) There is a narration which says: There are eight bearers of the Throne: four from the earlier ones, and four from the later ones. The four from the earlier ones are Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The four from the later ones are Muḥammad, ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.[2]

Author's comment: Based on the interpretation of the Throne as God's knowledge, there is no contradiction between having four angels as the bearers of the Throne, and also having other bearers.[3]

There are indeed many narrations concerning the Throne which are quite diverse. Their variety confirms the idea that the Throne represents God's knowledge [of all events and beings, clustered in an undifferentiated form], as we explained. Some narrations may suggest that the Throne is a physical reality, but they should be interpreted in light of what we said above [that they are symbolic representations to make the meaning more tangible and comprehensible]. There is no reliable narration which says that the Throne is a physical body in the form of a couch, placed on the seventh heaven. Rather, this is rejected by some narrations, such as hadith 4 above.

(16) Concerning *Who created the heavens and the earth in six days* (7:54) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: In six periods (*awqāt*).

(17) Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-Armanī says: I asked Imam Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī, "Teach me about these words of God: *All command belongs to Allah, before and after* (30:4)."
He said, "All command belongs to God before He commands and after He commands, as He wills."[4]
I said to myself, "This is the interpretation of the verse: *Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations* (7:54)."

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1 See volume 4, pp. 155-156 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 This is not a hadith, but it is mentioned in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. (Trans.)

3 That is, narrations which mention the number of bearers do not *limit* the number to that amount. In other words, they affirm but do not negate. (Trans.)

4 That is, He has absolute authority to command as He wills, and has absolute authority to alter it afterwards. He is not subject to the passage of time. (Trans.)

Then the Imam turned to me and said, "Yes, it is indeed as you said in your heart: *Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations* (7:54)."[1]

Author's comment: This means that the statement *Look! All creation and command belong to Him* (7:54) states that God is in charge of the affairs both before and after He decrees something. It is not like us who have control only before we make a verdict, but afterwards we are no longer in charge.

(18) The Messenger of God said: If one does not praise God for any good deed that he does, but praises himself instead, he has disbelieved [or has been ungrateful] and has destroyed his deed. If one thinks that God has given anything of the *amr* (command, matter, affairs) to the servants, he has disbelieved in what God has revealed to His prophets, because He says: *Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all nations* (7:54).[2]

Author's comment: Complacency (*ʿujb*) [about one's deeds] can be equated to *kufr* in two ways [based on the two definitions of *kufr*]: (1) It entails ungratefulness for God's blessings [to do righteous deeds]. (2) It implies disbelieving that good deeds belong to God. In the second part of the hadith, the idea that "nothing of the *amr* is left to the servants" refers to their *independent* possession and command of things. It does not deny people's subordinate control over their deeds and affairs as a result of God's endowment and conferment.

(19) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the verse: *And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration* (7:56). He said: The earth was corrupt, but God revived it with His Prophet. So *do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration* (7:56).[3]

(20) The Messenger of God said: The case of the guidance and

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1 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of the author of *Thāqib al-manāqib*, via its chain of narration up to Abū Hāshim al-Jaʿfarī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Shāmī, on the authority of his father who was a Companion of the Prophet.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muyassir. This is also narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Muyassir, via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*).

knowledge with which God has sent me can be compared to a heavy rain that falls on a region which consists of two parts: pure fields which absorb the water and grow lush vegetation and pastures; and hard fields which keep the water [on the ground], where people can take from it to drink and water their fields. It also falls on another region which consists of sterile deserts that neither hold the water nor grow any vegetation. The first is an example of those who achieve deep understanding (*fiqh*) in God's religion, who benefit from what God has sent me with, who learn it themselves and teach it to others. The second is an example of those who do not raise their heads,[1] and do not accept the guidance which I have been sent with.[2]

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1 That is, they pay no attention to God's revelation. Alternatively, "The second is an example of those who are not elevated by that whatsoever," meaning those who have no growth in knowledge and spirituality despite receiving God's revelation. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Nasāʾī, on the authority of Abū Mūsá.

Verses 59-64

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنا نُوحاً إِلى قَوْمِهِ فَقالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ إِنِّي أَخافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٥٩﴾ قالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَراكَ فِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٦٠﴾ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلالَةٌ وَ لكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٦١﴾ أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ أَنْصَحُ لَكُمْ وَ أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ ما لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾ أَ وَ عَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنْذِرَكُمْ وَ لِتَتَّقُوا وَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ الَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَ أَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا إِنَّهُمْ كانُوا قَوْماً عَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(7:59) *Certainly We sent Noah to his people. And he said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day."*

(7:60) *The elite of his people said, "Indeed we surely see you in manifest error."*

(7:61) *He said, "O my people, I am not in error. Rather, I am a messenger from the Lord of all nations.*

(7:62) *I communicate to you the messages of my Lord, and I am your well-wisher, and I know from Allah what you do not know.*

(7:63) *Do you consider it odd that a reminder from your Lord should come to you through a man from among yourselves, to warn you so that you may be Godwary and so that you may haply receive His mercy?"*

(7:64) *But they denied him. So We delivered him and those who were with him in the ark, and We drowned those who denied Our signs. Indeed they were a blind lot.*

Introduction

The previous verses invited the people to monotheism, and prohibited them from polytheism and denial of God's signs and communications. In

what follows, the chapter offers the stories of a few of the previous prophets in this regard, including Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel) and Moses. In the current set of verses, we read about the story of Noah and his people. He called them to serve God alone and abandon the worship of other gods. However, the majority of his people rejected his call and insistently disobeyed him. Thus God sent a hurricane, rescued Noah and those who believed in him, and drowned the rest of his people.

Commentary

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنا نُوحاً إِلى قَوْمِهِ فَقالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ إِنِّي أَخافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٥٩﴾

(7:59) ***Certainly*** **(la-qad)** ***We sent Noah to his people. And he said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day."***

Noah is the first messenger [chronologically] whose story is mentioned in detail in the Qur'an. We will discuss his detailed story in Sūrah Hūd [under verses 11:25-49], if God wills.

The letter *lām* in *la-qad* indicates a vow. It is an additional emphasis[1] because the original audience of the verse were polytheists who did not believe in prophethood.

… O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him…: He ascribed his audience to himself by saying: *O my people*. This shows his earnest good-will for them, which is narrated from him below [7:62]. His first message to them was that of monotheism, which is implied by the two sentences stated here. One the one hand, he told them to serve God; and on the other hand, he negated the existence of all gods besides Him. Put together, it means that one must worship God alone, and should not associate any partners with Him. This amounts to monotheism.

… Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day: This apparently refers to the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, this verse includes two of the three principle beliefs in religion: monotheism and afterlife. The third one—prophethood—is mentioned below: *O my people, I am*

1 The word *qad* also implies emphasis because it shows the occurrence of the event. (Trans.)

not in error. Rather, I am a messenger… (7:61). We can arguably say that the current verse also involves an indirect reference to his messengership, because he calls them to a certain kind of worship which was foreign to them. He also warned them of something that they were ignorant of, which was the punishment of the Day of Resurrection. This implies that he was a messenger sent from the One to Whom he calls them. This is confirmed below, when he replies to his people: *Do you consider it odd that a reminder from your Lord should come to you through a man from among yourselves, to warn you?* (7:63). This response shows that his people were doubtful of his mission as a messenger as soon as they heard his first call: *O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him.*

قالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَراكَ فِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٦٠﴾

(7:60) ***The elite* (al-malaʾ) *of his people said, "Indeed we surely see* (la-narāka, from ruʾyah) *you in manifest error."***

Malaʾ means "the chiefs and elites of a community." They are called *malaʾ* (lit. fillers) because they fill (*yamlaʾūna*, from the verb *malaʾa*) the hearts with awe and prestige, and fill the eyes with the luster of adornments and luxury. What is meant by "seeing" (*ruʾyah*) here is "view"—meaning one's opinion and judgment about someone or something.

They could not imagine that anyone would come up to them, claim to be a messenger, warn them of punishment, and command them to leave their gods aside and entirely dedicate themselves to God alone. They were completely shocked by his criticism of their way, which is shown in how they emphasized his error—with the adjective "manifest" and the letter *lām* (surely, indeed).

قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلالَةٌ وَ لكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٦١﴾

(7:61) ***He said, "O my people, I am not in error. Rather, I am a messenger from the Lord of all nations.***

Noah answered them by first offering a negation—that he is not in error—and then offering an affirmation instead—that he is a messenger from God. He specifically referred to God as the "Lord of all worlds" to show that all Lordship exclusively belongs to God. This is against what his people believed. They believed in a division of lordship and direction of the universe among their gods. Each of their gods was believed to control

a specific aspect of creation. For instance, they had a lord of the sea, a lord of the land, a lord of the earth, a lord of the sky, and so on. Noah did not use any emphasis in his reply in order to show that his messengership and his clearance from error are obvious, unlike his people who were emphatic in their claim.

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ أَنْصَحُ لَكُمْ وَ أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ ما لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(7:62) ***I communicate to you the messages of my Lord, and I am your well-wisher, and I know from Allah what you do not know.***

Here Noah tells them three things about himself. First and foremost, his job as a messenger was to communicate the messages of his Lord to them. The word "messages" (*risālāt*) is mentioned in the plural form, which shows that they were many. Besides the messages of monotheism and the afterlife [mentioned in verse 7:59], his mission included other messages that God had ordered him to deliver. After all, Noah was not only a prophet, but was among the Resolute Messengers (*ūlū al-ʿazm*), meaning that he had a scripture with a divine code of law (shariah).

Second, he told them about his good-will for them. He admonished them by giving them good news to encourage them to obey their Lord, and warning them to prevent them from arrogant rejection and disobedience against His worship. He did so based on what God had taught him about the beginning and the end of creation, and the divine laws and customs which govern the world. That is why he added as a third point that he knows from God what they know not. This refers to the events on the Day of Resurrection, the rewards and punishments that await the people, how obedience leads to God's satisfaction and bliss, and how disobedience results in God's dissatisfaction and vengeance.

Therefore, the three sentences mentioned in this verse—*I communicate to you…, and I am your well-wisher, and I know…*—serve the same purpose and build on one another. However, some exegetes have said that the first two sentences are two attributes for Noah, and the third one functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition of the subject in: *I am your well-wisher.*[1]

أَ وَ عَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنْذِرَكُمْ وَ لِتَتَّقُوا وَ

1 The meaning would be: "I am your well-wisher *while* I know…" (Trans.)

لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(7:63) ***Do you consider it odd that a reminder from your Lord should come to you through a man from among yourselves, to warn you so that you may be Godwary and so that you may haply*** **(laʿallakum)** ***receive His mercy?"***

This is a rhetorical question that implies a criticism. He repudiates them for doubting his claim to messengership and his call to the religion of truth. "Reminder" (*dhikr*) here means "that by which God is remembered," which refers to the divine teachings that were revealed to him. The verse involves an implied omission where it says: *from your Lord*. The implied meaning is: "A reminder which is (*kāʾin*) from your Lord."

… to warn you so that you may be Godwary and so that you may receive His mercy: These phrases show the intended purpose of the verb "should come" (*jāʾakum*). The meaning is: "A reminder has come from your Lord so that the messenger may warn you, so that you become Godwary, and so that God's mercy may hopefully embrace you." Even though *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint) leads to salvation, it is not a complete cause of it. That is why the verse uses the word *laʿalla* (maybe, perhaps, haply). This verse presents a brief summary of Noah's sublime divine teachings.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ الَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَ أَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا إِنَّهُمْ كانُوا قَوْماً عَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(7:64) ***But they denied him. So We delivered him and those who were with him in the ark*** **(al-fulk)**, ***and We drowned those who denied Our signs. Indeed they were a blind lot*** **(ʿamīn).**

Fulk is synonymous with *safīnah* (ship, boat, vessel). According to al-Rāghib, it is used equally for singular and plural. According to *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, it is both masculine and feminine.[1] *ʿAmīn* is an adjective used for *qawm* (lot, people, folk). It is the plural of *ʿamī*, which is a *ṣifah mushabbahah* derived from the root *ʿamiya yaʿmá ʿaman* (to be blind).[2] It is said that

1 That is, it can be used with adjectives and verbs in either the masculine or the feminine form. (Trans.)

2 *Ṣifah mushabbahah* (also called *ṣifah mushbihah*) is an adjective that is similar

ʿ*amī* is similar in meaning to *aʿmá* (blind), with the difference that the former is specifically used for the lack of insight [of the heart] while the latter is specifically used for the lack of sight [of the eye]. The rest of the verse should be clear.

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to an active participle. It serves as an adjective, and indicates the establishment, subsistence, and strength of a quality in the subject. (Trans.)

Verses 65-72

وَ إِلى عادٍ أَخاهُمْ هُوداً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَ فَلا
تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَراكَ فِي سَفاهَةٍ وَ إِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ
مِنَ الْكاذِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي سَفاهَةٌ وَ لكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾
أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ أَنَا لَكُمْ ناصِحٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿٦٨﴾ أَ وَ عَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جاءَكُمْ
ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنْذِرَكُمْ وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفاءَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَ زادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ بَصْطَةً فَاذْكُرُوا آلاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ
﴿٦٩﴾ قالُوا أَ جِئْتَنا لِنَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَ نَذَرَ ما كانَ يَعْبُدُ آباؤُنا فَأْتِنا بِما تَعِدُنا إِنْ
كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾ قالَ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ رِجْسٌ وَ غَضَبٌ أَ
تُجادِلُونَنِي فِي أَسْماءٍ سَمَّيْتُمُوها أَنْتُمْ وَ آباؤُكُمْ ما نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ بِها مِنْ سُلْطانٍ
فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ الَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَ
قَطَعْنا دابِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا وَ ما كانُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(7:65) *And to [the people of] ʿĀd, Hūd, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. Will you not then be wary [of Him]?"*

(7:66) *The elite of his people who were faithless said, "Indeed we see you to be in folly, and indeed we consider you to be a liar."*

(7:67) *He said, "O my people, I am not in folly. Rather, I am a messenger from the Lord of all nations.*

(7:68) *I communicate to you the messages of my Lord and I am a trustworthy well-wisher for you.*

(7:69) *Do you consider it odd that there should come to you a reminder from your Lord through a man from among yourselves, so that he may warn you? Remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah, and increased you vastly in creation.*

So remember Allah's bounties so that you may be felicitous."

(7:70) *They said, "Have you come to [tell] us that we should worship Allah alone and abandon what our fathers have been worshiping? Then bring us what you threaten us with, should you be truthful."*

(7:71) *He said, "There has become due against you a punishment and wrath from your Lord. Do you dispute with me regarding names which you have named—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority? So wait! I too am waiting along with you."*

(7:72) *Then We delivered him and those who were with him by a mercy from Us, and We cut off the end of those who denied Our signs and were not faithful.*

Commentary

وَ إِلى عادٍ أَخاهُمْ هُوداً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَ فَلا تَتَّقُونَ﴿٦٥﴾

(7:65) ***And to [the people of] ʿĀd, Hūd, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. Will you not then be wary [of Him]?"***

One's "brother" (*akh*, which is originally *akhū*) is one who shares the same birthrights as the person. This can come in a few ways: (1) It can be biological, through sharing either or both parents. (2) It can be legislated by religious, such as the law of "brother by fosterage" (*al-akh al-riḍāʿī*). (3) It can be through a social norm, as some communities had "adopted brothers." This is the origin of the term. However, it is used metaphorically to indicate any relationship between one and one's people, country, profession, trait, and so on. For example it is said, "the brother of Banū Tamīm," "the brother of Yathrib," "the brother of weaving" and "the brother of generosity" [all designated by *akhū*…]. This is what is meant when the verse says: *And to [the people of] ʿĀd, Hūd, their brother.*

… He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him…": This is similar to what we saw in the previous story. There is a subtle difference though: The verse in Noah's story was, *And he said* (fa-qāla)… (7:59), using the letter *fāʾ* (and, so, then) as a conjunction; but here the verse does not use any conjunction. The reason is that in this

verse, when the audience hears the first sentence—*And to [the people of] ʿĀd, Hūd, their brother*—it is expected to ask, "What did Hūd say?" Thus the next part of the verse is an answer to this expected question: *He said, "O my people, worship Allah…"* This is what al-Zamakhsharī says in *al-Kashshāf*.

To clarify this further, we should add that the same expectation does not exist in Noah's story, because that is the first story in the series. Based on that story, the audience realizes the general pattern of all these accounts: there is a messenger who calls his people to his message, where his people may either reject or accept him. Having learnt the first story, when the second story is introduced to the audience—that *And to [the people of] ʿĀd, Hūd, their brother*—it would naturally ask, "What did Hūd tell his people?" The answer is: *He said, "O my people…."*

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِي سَفَاهَةٍ وَ إِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(7:66) ***The elite of his people who were faithless said, "Indeed we see you to be in folly, and indeed we consider you to be a liar."***

The verse specifies a subset of *The elite of his people* by adding the qualification: *who were faithless*. This shows that some of the elite among his people believed in God but concealed their faith. There was no such group in Noah's people, and that is why we did not encounter this qualification above: *The elite of his people said…* (7:60). This is al-Zamakhsharī's view.

… Indeed we see you to be in folly* (safāhah)*, and indeed we consider you to be a liar: This sentence includes several emphases, which show that they were not anticipating anyone to say what he said. Their idols had captured their hearts, and the custom of idol-worship was so established among them that no one dared to criticize it. That is why they were shocked by Hūd's message. They rejected him purely based on surprise and unlikelihood. They accused him of *safāhah* (foolishness), meaning lack of intelligence, which results in having wrong views. Then they added that they seriously speculated that he was one of the liars. Apparently by "liars" they meant the [other divine] prophets, because they did not believe in prophethood. His people had received prophets prior to Hūd, as God says: *Such were [the people of] ʿĀd: they impugned the signs of their Lord and disobeyed His messengers, and followed the dictates of every obdurate*

tyrant (11:59).[1]

قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي سَفاهَةٌ وَ لكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(7:67) ***He said, "O my people, I am not in folly. Rather, I am a messenger from the Lord of all nations.***

This is similar to what we read in the story of Noah [7:61]. A difference here is that his people—ʿĀd—where more impudent than Noah's, because Noah's people accused him of error in view (*ḍalāl fī al-raʾy*), while ʿĀd accused Hūd of folly (*safāhah*).[2] Nevertheless, Hūd maintained the dignity, courtesy and manners that befit a prophet of God in his divine mission. He addressed them by ascribing them to himself: *O my people*, which shows his compassion toward them and his eagerness to save them.

… I am not in folly. Rather, I am a messenger from the Lord of all nations: Like Noah, Hūd simply denied their accusation, and instead affirmed his messengership without any emphasis. This is based on his claim being very clear.

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ أَنَا لَكُمْ ناصِحٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

(7:68) ***I communicate to you the messages of my Lord and I am a trustworthy well-wisher for you.***

That is: Since I am a messenger, my job is only to convey the messages of my Lord to you. Hūd described himself as *amīn* (trustworthy) in response to their accusation that: *indeed we consider you to be a liar* (7:66). It means: "I have not disrespected or violated any of your rights." He also described himself as *nāṣiḥ* (well-wisher, sincere advisor), which implies the following ideas: (1) "I am completely pure and exempt (*khāliṣ*) from the charge of being a liar, which you entertain about me." (2) "I am not deceitful (*ghāshsh*) in what I am preaching to you." (3) "I have not been disloyal (*khāʾin*)[3] with the true message which I have received. Rather, I

1 Also see verse 46:21. (Trans.)

2 Noah's people said, "You are a thinker; you have some views; but your views are wrong." Hūd's people said, "You are a fool; you have no intellectual capacity to begin with." (Trans.)

3 The words in brackets are the opposites of *nāṣiḥ*. The author has used them in order to clarify the meaning of *nāṣiḥ* by contrast. (Trans.)

am calling you to monotheism because I can see that it is the religion of truth, and in it lies your good and benefit."

أَ وَ عَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنْذِرَكُمْ وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَ زادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ بَصْطَةً فَاذْكُرُوا آلاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(7:69) ***Do you consider it odd that there should come to you a reminder from your Lord through a man from among yourselves, so that he may warn you? Remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah, and increased you vastly* (baṣṭah) *in creation. So remember Allah's bounties* (ālāʾ) *so that you may be felicitous."***

Baṣṭah is the same as *basṭah* (extension, expansion, increase, growth). The letter *sīn* is converted to *ṣād* because of its adjacency to the letter *ṭāʾ* [which has greater affinity with *ṣād* than with *sīn*]. *Sīn* is one of *ḥurūf al-iṭbāq* (letters of conformity); another example of its conformity [with its adjacent letters] is the word *ṣirāṭ* (Bridge), which was originally *sirāṭ*. *Ālāʾ* is the plural of *aly* and *ily*, which mean *niʿmah* (bounty, blessing, boon). *Ālāʾ* is similar in construction to *ānāʾ*, which is the plural of *any* and *iny* (time, period, duration).

In the first part of the verse, Hūd repudiates his people for doubting his claim to messengership, as we saw in the story of Noah [7:63]. Then he reminds them of God's bounties upon them, and specifically points out two manifest blessings among them: (1) God made them successors on the earth after the people of Noah. (2) Among all nations, God especially privileged them by expanding and growing their creation physically, which entails greater strength and capability. This shows that ʿĀd was a civilization which preceded the other civilizations [after Noah], and was known for great power and might. Then he referred to the rest of God's blessings by saying: *So remember Allah's bounties* (ālāʾ) *so that you may be felicitous*.

قالُوا أَ جِئْتَنا لِنَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَ نَذَرَ ما كانَ يَعْبُدُ آباؤُنا فَأْتِنا بِما تَعِدُنا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(7:70) ***They said, "Have you come to [tell] us that we should worship Allah alone and abandon what our fathers have been worshiping? Then***

bring us what you threaten us with, should you be truthful."

Their response here shows that they were committed to following their forefathers. They challenged Hūd to bring the punishment that he was threatening them with. This implies mocking and derision.

قالَ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ رِجْسٌ وَ غَضَبٌ أَ تُجادِلُونَنِي فِي أَسْماءٍ سَمَّيْتُمُوها أَنْتُمْ وَ آباؤُكُمْ ما نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ بِها مِنْ سُلْطانٍ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

(7:71) ***He said, "There has become due against you a punishment*** **(rijs)** ***and wrath from your Lord. Do you dispute with me regarding names which you have named—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority? So wait! I too am waiting along with you.***"

Rijs and *rijz* signify either an event or an object that if something is affected by it, that thing has to be taken away, or people keep away from it. Thus the two terms are used for "filth," because one keeps away from it in dislike. They are also used for "punishment," because one who is punished is distanced from one who punishes him, or from other people who are secure from the punishment. Hūd told his people that due to their insistence on the way of their fathers to worship the idols, they are subject to God's punishment and wrath, which distance them from Him.

… So wait! I too am waiting along with you: Here Hūd threatens them with the punishment that they were pushing for, and tells them that it shall certainly overtake them. He expressed his threat indirectly, by ordering them to wait, and informing them that he too shall wait for the coming of God's punishment.

… Do you dispute with me regarding names which you have named—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority **(sulṭān)*? …:*** Here Hūd refutes their argument for worshiping their gods. Their argument was: (a) They found their fathers worshiping these gods. (b) Their fathers were certainly more perfect than them and others at their level, such as Hūd. (c) Hence, they must follow their fathers.

Sulṭān (authority, dominion) means decisive proof and argument (*burhān*, *ḥujjah*). Hūd's answer can be elaborated as follows: "You and your fathers are the same in that you all claim something for which there is no proof, and that is the divinity of your gods. Hence, what remains of

their divinity is only an empty name and title which you have attached to these gods, where you call them 'the god of fertility,' 'the god of war,' 'the god of sea' and 'the god of land.' These labels do not correspond to any reality except in your imagination. So do you dispute with me concerning mere names? As long as one is not concerned with the external existence and realization of a meaning, they can apply any name that they want to anything that they wish."

… names which you have named—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority…: This expression is repeated in several places in the Qur'an, when arguing against idolatry. It is a very delicate expression, a clear argument, and a decisive proof. It says that if one does not provide a rational argument for what one claims, then what remains of it will be only a label and appellation. It is rather a clear form of ignorance if one relies on such appellations as a basis [for their world-view or their everyday practice].

The same can be said about all cases where one relies on any means other than God. If we analyze all cases when one gets attached to something or someone as an independent entity, obeys it, and seeks to gain favor with it, we will observe the same scenario. Indeed, there are several places in the Qur'an where God counts obedience and reliance as forms of *ʿibadah* (worship, service). For example He says: *Did I not make a covenant with you, O children of Adam, saying, "Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. But worship Me; that is a straight path"?* (36:60-61).[1]

فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ الَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَ قَطَعْنا دابِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا وَ ما كانُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

1 In other words, any plans that we rely on, any strategies that we employ, any means or connections that we hope to help us, and any goal that we attach our hearts to—they are all empty shells that are devoid of any real impact in and of themselves. They are at best channels through which God's grace flows. Those who are short-sighted only see the apparent cover on the surface, and take it to be a genuine cause at work in the world. But that is merely an empty label that is being applied to what is only an expression and reflection of God's work. This means that *sulṭān* (authority, proof, dominion) in this verse can also be interpreted in a *takwīnī* (creational, causal, existential) sense. God has not given creational authority to these apparent means and instruments to effect change in the universe and fulfill one's need. (Trans.)

(7:72) ***Then We delivered him and those who were with him by a mercy from Us, and We cut off the end of those who denied Our signs and were not faithful.***

The word "mercy" is in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), which means a specific kind (*nawʿ*) of mercy. That is God's special mercy for the believers, whereby He helps them in accordance to His promise. He says: *Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses rise up* (40:51); *and it was a must for Us to help the faithful* (30:47).

… and We cut off the end **(dābir)** ***of those who denied Our signs…:*** This refers to destroying them and uprooting their lineage. The *dābir* (end, tail, remnant) of something is "something that is behind it." Sometimes it is used for what comes before something, as yesterday is called *ams al-dābir* (the "last day" which turned away). And sometimes it is used for what comes after something, as the last members of a group are called *dābir al-qawm*. One's future generation comes "after" him, and killing the person means "disconnecting" this link. That is why the verse describes their extermination by saying: *We cut off the end*. We shall discuss the story of Hūd elaborately in our exposition of Sūrah Hūd [under verses 11:50-60], by God's will.

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Verses 73-79

وَ إِلى ثَمُودَ أَخاهُمْ صالِحاً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ هذِهِ ناقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةً فَذَرُوها تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَ لا تَمَسُّوها بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾ وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عادٍ وَ بَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِها قُصُوراً وَ تَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبالَ بُيُوتاً فَاذْكُرُوا آلاءَ اللَّهِ وَ لا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾ قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِمَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ أَ تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ صالِحاً مُرْسَلٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ قالُوا إِنَّا بِما أُرْسِلَ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ قالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِي آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ كافِرُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَ عَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَ قالُوا يا صالِحُ ائْتِنا بِما تَعِدُنا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دارِهِمْ جاثِمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسالَةَ رَبِّي وَ نَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَ لكِنْ لا تُحِبُّونَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(7:73) *And to [the people of] Thamūd, Ṣāliḥ, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. So let her alone to graze [freely] in Allah's land, and do not cause her any harm, for then you shall be seized by a painful punishment.*

(7:74) *Remember when He made you successors after [the people of] ʿĀd, and settled you in the land: you build palaces in its plains, and hew houses out of the mountains. So remember Allah's bounties, and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption."*

(7:75) *The elite of his people who were arrogant said to those who were abased—to those among them who had faith—"Do you know that Ṣāliḥ has been sent by his Lord?" They said, "We indeed*

believe in what he has been sent with."

(7:76) *Those who were arrogant said, "We indeed disbelieve in what you have believed."*

(7:77) *So they hamstrung the She-camel and defied the command of their Lord, and they said, "O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you threaten us with, if you are one of the messengers."*

(7:78) *So the earthquake seized them, and they lay lifeless prostrate in their homes.*

(7:79) *So he abandoned them [to their fate], and said, "O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the message of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher, but you did not like well-wishers."*

Commentary

وَ إِلى ثَمُودَ أَخاهُمْ صالِحاً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ هذِهِ ناقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةً فَذَرُوها تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَ لا تَمَسُّوها بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

(7:73) ***And to [the people of] Thamūd, Ṣāliḥ, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. So let her alone to graze [freely] in Allah's land, and do not cause her any harm, for then you shall be seized by a painful punishment.***

Thamūd was an ancient community of Arabs living in al-Aḥqāf (lit. sand-dunes) in Yemen.[1] God sent them *Ṣāliḥ, their brother*, meaning that he was of the same tribe.

… He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him…": He called his people to monotheism since they were polytheists and used to worship idols. This is much like the missions of Noah and Hūd, who were sent to polytheist tribes.

… There has certainly come to you a manifest proof* (bayyinah) *from your Lord…: Bayyinah means "decisive witness or evidence." Ṣāliḥ pointed

1 This is a mistake. It was the tribe ʿĀd which lived in al-Aḥqāf, as stated in verse 46:21. Thamūd lived in a land called al-Ḥijr, as mentioned in verse 15:80. (Trans.)

to this manifest proof and said: *This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you*. That was a she-camel that God brought out for them from the mountain by Ṣāliḥ's supplication. The ascription of the she-camel to God shows a special divine relation and attention (*ʿināyah*).

… So let her alone to graze [freely] in Allah's land…: The letter *fāʾ* (so, therefore, then) at the beginning of this sentence shows that this order is consequent to the she-camel being a sign of God. This law was a restriction on them which could result in God's exterminating punishment. Such punishments serve as the final decision between a prophet and his people. God says: *There is a messenger for every nation; so when their messenger comes, judgement is made between them with justice, and they are not wronged* (10:47). The verse implies that leaving the she-camel alone to graze in the land was something demanding and difficult for them to observe. Referring to the land as *Allah's land* alludes to this idea.[1]

… and do not cause her any harm, for then you shall be seized by a painful punishment: Ṣāliḥ admonished them and warned them that they should not stop the she-camel from moving around freely. They should not cause any harm to it, such as hamstringing or slaughtering it. Otherwise, its consequence will be a painful punishment that will befall them.

وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عادٍ وَ بَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِها قُصُوراً وَ تَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبالَ بُيُوتاً فَاذْكُرُوا آلاءَ اللَّهِ وَ لا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(7:74) ***Remember when He made you successors after [the people of] ʿĀd, and settled you* (bawwaʾakum) *in the land: you build palaces* (quṣūran) *in its plains* (suhūlihā)*, and hew houses out of the mountains. So remember Allah's bounties, and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption."***

Bawwaʾa means *makkana* (to establish, to settle, to give dwelling). *Suhūl* is the plural of *sahl* (plain, lowland), which is the opposite of *jabal* (mountain, highland). It is called *sahl* (lit. smooth, flat, easy) because it is easy to walk through. *Quṣūr* has been defined as "buildings that are

1 That is, since this was a challenging imposition, Ṣāliḥ had to remind them explicitly: "This is *God's* land, not *yours*, so you have no right to stop His she-camel from freely grazing in His land." (Trans.)

fortified by walls."

Ṣāliḥ, like Hūd [in verse 7:69], told his people to remember God's blessings upon them. He reminded them of how God had made them succeed previous nations like ʿĀd. God gave them dwellings in the earth where they could settle. He enabled them to build palaces from the plains, and carve houses in the mountains, where they could live and shelter themselves.

… So remember Allah's bounties…: This is a brief summary of the elaborate enumeration at the beginning of the verse. The letter *fāʾ* (so, therefore, then) at the beginning of this sentence shows that this is a conclusion and consequence following the previous part. It suggests that what is stated here is different from what was mentioned before. He first ordered them to remember God's bounties and counted a list of them, as if they were ignorant of them. Then he said: "Now that God has blessed you with such great bounties that I enumerated for you, *so remember Allah's bounties*."

… and do not act wickedly* (taʿtahw, from ʿathy) *on the earth, causing corruption: The conjunction "and" joins this sentence to *So remember*, as a necessary implication of it. Three definitions have been offered for the word ʿ*athy*: (1) *fasād* (corruption, mischief, ruin); (2) *iḍṭirāb* (disturbance, disorder, agitation); (3) *mubālaghah* (excess, overabundance, exaggeration). Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufaradāt*:

> ʿ*Ayth* and ʿ*athy* are similar in meaning, much like *jadhb* and *jabdh* (attraction, pull). The difference is that ʿ*ayth* is more commonly used for corruption that is observed by the senses, while ʿ*athy* is more used for corruption that is observed intellectually. It is used as ʿ*athiya yaʿthá ʿithyan*. Thus the Qur'an says: *and do not act wickedly* (taʿthaw) *on the earth, causing corruption* (7:74).

قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِمَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ أَ تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ صالِحاً مُرْسَلٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ قالُوا إِنَّا بِما أُرْسِلَ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ قالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِي آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ كافِرُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(7:75-76) ***The elite of his people who were arrogant said to those who were abased—to those among them who had faith—"Do you know that Ṣāliḥ has been sent by his Lord?" They said, "We indeed believe in what he***

has been sent with." Those who were arrogant said, "We indeed disbelieve in what you have believed."

To those among them who had faith is used interchangeably and interpretively for *those who were abased*. This shows that the *mustaḍʿafūn* (the abased, the disadvantaged, the oppressed) were the believers, and the believers were the *mustaḍʿafūn*. No one among the arrogant elite of his tribe believed in Ṣāliḥ. The rest of the two verses should be clear.

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَ عَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَ قالُوا يا صالِحُ ائْتِنا بِما تَعِدُنا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(7:77) ***So they hamstrung*** **(fa-ʿaqarū)** ***the She-camel and defied*** **(ʿataw, from ʿutuww)** ***the command of their Lord, and they said, "O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you threaten us with, if you are one of the messengers."***

When one uproots a palm tree, it is said, *ʿaqara al-nakhlah*. When used for a camel, it means either (1) slaughtering the camel (called *naḥr*); or (2) cutting its legs. *ʿUtuww* means "revolt, refusal." Here it is used with the particle *ʿan* (from, of), which shows that their revolt and refusal was out of arrogance and pride (which amounts to defiance). The rest of the verse should be clear.

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دارِهِمْ جاثِمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسالَةَ رَبِّي وَ نَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَ لكِنْ لا تُحِبُّونَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(7:78-79) ***So the earthquake*** **(al-rajfah)** ***seized them, and they lay lifeless prostrate*** **(jāthimīn, from juthūm)** ***in their homes. So he abandoned them [to their fate], and said, "O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the message of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher, but you did not like well-wishers."***

Rajfah means "severe shaking and vibration," as in an earthquake or a turbulent sea. When a camel rests its chest on the ground, it is called *burūk*. The same act by a human or a bird is called *juthūm*. Here God says that the cause of their death was that they were seized by a *rajfah* (shaking, quake). Elsewhere He says: *The Cry seized those who were wrongdoers* (11:67); *So the bolt of a humiliating punishment seized them* (41:17). The connection is that thunderbolts are accompanied by frightening roars. Usually, the atmospheric turbulence is also transferred to the earth in the

form of a quake. It could also be that *rajfah* here means the quivering of their hearts and bodies [out of terror]. Therefore, their punishment was a bolt generated in the sky, accompanied with a dreadful cry, and causing a quake in the earth or in their hearts. As a result, they ended up in their homes *jāthimīn*, which means "fell down on their faces and knees." *Their homes* here means "their city."

This verse is not concerned with *how* this exterminating punishment was brought about. Instead, its main theme is to say that this punishment was directed at them because of disbelieving and wronging a sign and miracle of God. The rest of the meaning should be clear.

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Verses 80-84

وَ لُوطاً إِذْ قالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَ تَأْتُونَ الْفاحِشَةَ ما سَبَقَكُمْ بِها مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّساءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُسْرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾ وَ ما كانَ جَوابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلاَّ أَنْ قالُوا أَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ إِنَّهُمْ أُناسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ أَهْلَهُ إِلاَّ امْرَأَتَهُ كانَتْ مِنَ الْغابِرِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَ أَمْطَرْنا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَراً فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(7:80) *And Lot, when he said to his people, "What! Do you commit an outrage none in the world ever committed before you?!*
(7:81) *Indeed you come to men with lust instead of women! Rather, you are a profligate lot."*
(7:82) *But the only answer of his people was that they said, "Expel them from your town! They are indeed a puritanical lot."*
(7:83) *So We delivered him and his family, except his wife; she was one of those who remained behind.*
(7:84) *Then We poured down upon them a rain [of stones]. So observe how was the fate of the guilty!*

Commentary

وَ لُوطاً إِذْ قالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَ تَأْتُونَ الْفاحِشَةَ ما سَبَقَكُمْ بِها مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(7:80) ***And Lot, when he said to his people, "What! Do you commit an outrage none in the world ever committed before you?!***

Apparently the conjunction "and" connects this verse to the other stories in the series, going back to the verse that introduced Noah: *Certainly We sent Noah* (7:59). Therefore, the meaning would be: "And certainly We sent Lot, when he said to his people…" However, usually in cases like this in the Qur'an, the "and" at the beginning of the story implies an omitted

command: *udhkur* (remember). This is inferred from the theme and flow of the verses. In that case, the meaning would be: "And remember Lot, whom We sent, when he said to his people…"

There is a slight difference between how Prophet Lot is introduced here and how Prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ were introduced above [in verses 7:65 and 7:73]. This is apparently because Lot was a follower of Abraham's code of law, as opposed to Hūd and Ṣāliḥ who were followers of Noah's religion. This difference is indicated by how he is introduced. For the same reason the verses revert to the previous way of introduction in the next story, about Prophet Shuʿayb [because he followed Noah's code of law, not Abraham's].

Lot was sent to Sodom and its vicinity and called them to the religion of monotheism, since they were polytheists and idol-worshipers. We shall discuss his story in detail in Sūrah Hūd [under verses 11:77-83], by God's will.

… What! Do you commit an outrage* (al-fāḥishah)*…: By saying *fāḥishah* (indecency, outrage, flagrant act) he meant *lawāṭ* (sodomy, homosexuality). This is clarified by the next verse: *Indeed you come to men with lust* (7:81).

… none in the world ever committed before you: The verse literally says, "None of *al-ʿālamīn*," where *ʿālamīn* means "human communities and nations." This shows that the history of homosexuality goes back to the time of Lot and his people. We shall have an elaborate discussion about this history in Sūrah Hūd.

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُسْرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(7:81) ***Indeed you come to men with lust instead of women! Rather, you are a profligate lot."***

"Coming" (*ityān*) is used as an indirect reference to intercourse, as indicated by: *with lust*.

… instead of women…: This phrase also indicates that the verse is about sexual intercourse. It also shows that they had completely abandoned mating with women, and were satisfying their sexual desire only with men.

… Rather, you are a profligate lot: They are called *musrif* (profligate, extravagant) because they exceeded the limits of their natural makeup and transgressed beyond it.

The word "indeed" (*inna*, *anna*) implies the certain occurrence and realization of the event. The verse involves an omitted interrogative *hamzah* at the beginning.[1] The implied meaning is: "Is it really true that you come to men…?" This rhetorical question shows how shocking and unbelievable their act was. They had invented an indecency that no one in the world had committed prior to them.

وَ ما كانَ جَوابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلاَّ أَنْ قالُوا أَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ إِنَّهُمْ أُناسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(7:82) ***But the only answer of his people was that they said, "Expel them from your town! They are indeed a puritanical lot."***

This means that they really had no answer for him, so instead they threatened him with expatriation. Lot challenged them by asking: *What! Do you commit an outrage none in the world ever committed before you?* (7:80). In order to answer this, they had to either provide an explanation showing that he was wrong in his judgment, or accept and admit its truth. However, their response was neither of these two, as they said: *Expel them from your town…* When respondents give an answer that is completely irrelevant to the question, it shows two things about the respondents: (1) their lack of answer; (2) their lack of intelligence.

… Expel them from your town! They are indeed a puritanical lot: This statement shows their contempt and derogation of Lot. It means: "The town belongs to you [O people], while Lot and his followers are immigrants who are not originally from here. They keep themselves clear and pure of what you do. Let them not concern you because they are a few individuals who are small in number and power."[2]

فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ أَهْلَهُ إِلاَّ امْرَأَتَهُ كانَتْ مِنَ الْغابِرِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(7:83) ***So We delivered him and his family, except his wife; she was one of those who remained behind.***

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1 The *hamzah* is explicitly mentioned in the last verse, and implied here because this verse is a continuation of Lot's address. The *hamzah* is elided and merged with *inna* in this verse. That is why the first word has been recited in three ways: *innakum*, *annakum*, *a-innakum*. (Trans.)

2 In other words: "Do not be afraid of them. They are no big deal." (Trans.)

This verse shows that no one believed in Lot outside his family. Elsewhere God says: *but We did not find there other than one house of muslims [or submitters]* (51:36).

***she was one of those who remained behind* (al-ghābirīn):** That is, she was among those who were left behind or stayed behind (*māḍīn*). This is an indirect way of saying that she was killed. The rest of the verse should be clear.

وَ أَمْطَرْنا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَراً فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(7:84) ***Then We poured down upon them a rain [of stones]. So observe how was the fate of the guilty!***

Given the context of the verses [with comparison to the previous stories], it is naturally expected here to describe their exterminating punishment. This contextual expectation shows that the "rain" was indeed their punishment. "A rain" is mentioned in an indefinite form (*nakirah*), which shows that it was an unusual event with a tremendous impact. God explains it elsewhere in the Qur'an: *and We rained on it stones of laminar shale, marked with your Lord [for the profligate], never far from the wrongdoers* (11:82-83).

… So observe how was the fate of the guilty: This is addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad, so that he and his nation may learn a lesson.

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Verses 85-93

وَ إِلى مَدْيَنَ أَخاهُمْ شُعَيْباً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَ الْمِيزانَ وَ لا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْياءَهُمْ وَ لا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلاحِها ذلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ وَ لا تَقْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِراطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَ تَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِهِ وَ تَبْغُونَها عِوَجاً وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلاً فَكَثَّرَكُمْ وَ انْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾ وَ إِنْ كانَ طائِفَةٌ مِنْكُمْ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ وَ طائِفَةٌ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّى يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنا وَ هُوَ خَيْرُ الْحاكِمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يا شُعَيْبُ وَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنا أَوْ لَتَعُودُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنا قالَ أَ وَ لَوْ كُنَّا كارِهِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾ قَدِ افْتَرَيْنا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِباً إِنْ عُدْنا فِي مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّانَا اللَّهُ مِنْها وَ ما يَكُونُ لَنا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيها إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنا وَسِعَ رَبُّنا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْماً عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنا رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنا وَ بَيْنَ قَوْمِنا بِالْحَقِّ وَ أَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفاتِحِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾ وَ قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتُمْ شُعَيْباً إِنَّكُمْ إِذاً لَخاسِرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دارِهِمْ جاثِمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْباً كَأَنْ لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْباً كانُوا هُمُ الْخاسِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ نَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ آسى عَلى قَوْمٍ كافِرِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(7:85) *And to [the people of] Midian, Shuʿayb, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. So observe fully the measure and the balance, and*

do not cheat the people of their goods, and do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration. That is better for you, if you are believers.

(7:86) *And do not lie in wait on every road threatening and barring from the way of Allah those who have faith in Him, seeking to make it crooked. And remember when you were few, and He multiplied you, and observe how was the fate of the agents of corruption.*

(7:87) *If a group of you have believed in what I have been sent with, and a group have not believed, be patient until Allah judges between us, and He is the best of judges."*

(7:88) *The elite of his people who were arrogant said, "O Shuʿayb, we will surely expel you and the faithful who are with you from our town, or else you shall surely revert to our creed." He said, "What! Even if we should be unwilling?!*

(7:89) *We would be fabricating a lie against Allah should we revert to your creed after Allah has delivered us from it. It does not behoove us to return to it, unless Allah, our Lord, should will so. Our Lord embraces all things in [His] knowledge. In Allah we have put our trust." "Our Lord! Decide justly between us and our people, and You are the best of deciders!"*

(7:90) *The elite of his people who were faithless said, "If you follow Shuʿayb, you will indeed be losers."*

(7:91) *So the earthquake seized them, and they lay lifeless prostrate in their homes.*

(7:92) *Those who impugned Shuʿayb became as if they had never lived there. Those who impugned Shuʿayb were themselves the losers.*

(7:93) *So he abandoned them [to their fate] and said, "O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the messages of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher. So how should I grieve for a faithless lot?"*

Commentary

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وَ إِلى مَدْيَنَ أَخاهُمْ شُعَيْباً قالَ يا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ ما لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَ الْمِيزانَ وَ لا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْياءَهُمْ وَ لا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلاحِها ذلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ

مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(7:85) ***And to [the people of] Midian, Shuʿayb, their brother. He said, "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. So observe fully the measure and the balance, and do not cheat the people of their goods, and do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration. That is better for you, if you are believers.***

The conjunction "and" at the beginning of this verse connects the verse to the first story in this series, which was Noah's story [7:59]. Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel) established his mission on monotheism, just like the other prophets that were mentioned before.

… There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord…: This sentence shows that Shuʿayb had a miracle to prove his messengership. However, the Qur'an does not tell us what his miracle was exactly. The Qur'an describes the punishment that befell his people, but a miraculous punishment which exterminates the disbelievers cannot be the miracle which proves the truth of one's prophetic mission. Such a miracle would not be helpful to most of his people who were disbelievers, since it was a cause of their death. This is confirmed by the next part of the verse, which is mentioned as a conclusion, indicated by the letter *fāʾ* (so, therefore, then): *So observe fully the measure and the balance*. It suggests that this order was made consequent to his miracle. Obviously, his order to obey could only be *before* their death through divine intervention.

After commanding them to monotheism, which is the root of religion, Shuʿayb issued two further commands: (1) *So observe fully the measure and the balance, and do not cheat the people of their goods*. This shows that financial corruption and unjust transactions were common among them. (2) *And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration*. The earth is set right by God in two ways: (1) in the way He has created it naturally; (2) in the way He has created human conscience and intuition (*fiṭrah*), which motivates the people to maintain order on the earth so that they may enjoy a prosperous life.

"Causing corruption" is used without any qualification, which would include all forms of sin and wrong, whether against God or against other people. However, given its contradistinction with what is mentioned before and after, it would more specifically pertain to forms of corruption

that cause insecurity with respect to the lives, dignity and possessions of the people on a social level. Some examples of such corruption are robbery, slander, unjust murder and banditry.

… That* (dhālikum) *is better for you, if you are believers: This sentence justifies the two commands of Shuʿayb as follows:

(1) The functioning and continuation of the human societies hinges on transactions between the people based on gains from trade. One needs to sell what one has excess of, and use that to purchase what one needs and lacks. This requires a sense of universal security with respect to financial transactions, without any misinformation about either the quality or quantity of the products. If one allows oneself to cheat others of their goods, it means that he permits that act from anyone, which results in the prevalence of cheating.[1] However, if fraud, deception and cheating become prevalent in the society through all kinds of tricks and techniques, then there is no guarantee that one does not get poison instead of the cure, an inferior good instead of a quality good, a mixed product instead of a genuine one, or anything instead of anything for that matter. This will certainly have human and financial costs. *So observe fully the measure and the balance, and do not cheat the people of their goods.*

(2) If there is no sense of safety and security, the entire society will be crippled in all aspects, and all forms of activity and production will come to a halt. This results in the loss of crops, individuals and humanity. Thus: *do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration.*

… if you are believers: There are two possible interpretations for *īmān* (belief, faith) here: (2) If you believe and confirm what I say, you will enjoy the benefits of observing the measure and the balance, not cheating the people of their goods, and not causing corruption on the earth. (2) If you are believers in the truth, you will know that these commands are in your own best interest.

What we said so far assume that the demonstrative pronoun *dhālikum* ("that" in *That is better for you*) refers to the commands mentioned after *observe fully the measure…*, but does not refer to the first command of worshiping God alone. This is confirmed by theme and context of the verse. Moreover, in the above interpretations, *īmān* is meant in its literal

1 This is the same as Kant's principle of universalizability in ethics. (Trans.)

sense, which is to trust, accept and confirm what one says.[1] However, some exegetes have interpreted *īmān* in its technical religious sense [that is, belief in God, revelation and afterlife]. Thus they have offered the following two interpretations:

(1) The disbelievers will not really benefit from my commands because their disbelief will cause them eternal loss and wretchedness. This life is rather a realm of illusion and play, and, in this world, they only gain short-lived benefits which do not count as real good. *But the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known* (29:64).

(2) The demonstrative pronoun *dhālikum* ("that" in *That is better for you*) refers to everything mentioned previously in the verse, and, not in its literal sense.

Comments: (i) The first view is also based on the demonstrative pronoun *dhālikum* referring only to the commands mentioned after *observe fully the measure…* (ii) The second view is more like making something conditional on itself, because worshiping God implies belief in Him. It effectively means: "If you are believers, then it is better for you to worship God, to fully observe the measure and balance, and to not cause mischief on the earth."[2] (iii) Both of these views, offered by the exegetes, suffer from the following problem: The qualification, *if you are believers*, apparently means that they already have the quality of *īmān* (belief, faith). This is based on how the qualification is structured: *in kuntum muʾminīn*, where *kuntum* is the past tense of the verb *kawn* (to be), and *muʾmin* is an active participial noun (*ism al-fāʿil*). Their combination shows an agent who is firmly established in the quality of *īmān*.[3] One would not use this expression to address a community that consists of both disbelievers and believers, the disobedient and the obedient. If what is meant here were *īmān* in its technical religious sense, then the verse should have said, "That is better for you if you believe (*in āmantum*, or *in tuʾminū*)." Therefore, we apparently have no choice but to interpret *īmān* in its literal sense [so that it would include religious disbelievers].

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1 In this case it means trusting Shuʿayb-or his message-as being truthful. (Trans.)

2 In other words, this reduces to a tautology because the commands mentioned in the verse are necessary results of being a believer. (Trans.)

3 If it were not an established quality, the verse should have used a verb instead of a noun. (Trans.)

وَ لا تَقْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِراطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَ تَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِهِ وَ تَبْغُونَها عِوَجاً وَ اذْكُرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلاً فَكَثَّرَكُمْ وَ انْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(7:86) ***And do not lie in wait on every road threatening and barring from the way of Allah those who have faith in Him, seeking to make it crooked. And remember when you were few, and He multiplied you, and observe how was the fate of the agents of corruption.***

Based on the theme and flow of the verse, *threatening and barring* function as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition of the subject implied by *do not lie*. Likewise, *seeking* function as a *ḥāl*, describing the condition of the subject of the verb *barring*.[1]

This is the third specific message of Shuʿayb to his people. He ordered them to not interfere with the straight path, which is the same as God's religion. This implicitly shows that his people used to stop the believers in their way and threaten them for believing in God, meeting Shuʿayb, listening to him, and practicing their religion with him. Those who were committed to polytheism wanted the believers to abandon their commitment to the religion of truth, and to stop pursuing the path of monotheism. They sought to bend God's way—which is the way of our divine conscience and intuition (*fiṭrah*).

Overall, they employed all their means and strategies to cut off the way of faith. Shuʿayb prohibited them from this. He advised them to remember God's blessings upon them, and to learn a lesson from what they knew of the previous nations and the unfortunate end of those who cause mischief on the earth.

… And remember when you were few, and He multiplied you, and observe how was the fate of the agents of corruption…: This statement is made with a tone of advice and admonition. It is a general statement that can complement all of the previous commands and prohibitions [in this verse and the last].

… And remember when you were few, and He multiplied you…: He

1 The meaning would be: "Do not lie in wait on every road *while* you threaten and bar from God's way; and do not bar from His way *while* you seek to make it crooked." (Trans.)

ordered them to remember how they gradually increased in number through procreation. This is one of the greatest blessings of God upon humankind, because humans cannot live alone without a society. The human species is destined for a lofty stage of perfection and felicity that distinguishes it from all other animals and beings. Divine grace has given humans a special composition and has equipped them with a variety of faculties and instruments. However, their individual capacity does not allow them to utilize all of their assets to fulfill their wide range of needs. They need to join forces to meet their needs for food, drink, shelter, clothing, sex and so on. This collaboration spans the areas of thought, decision making, and action. Clearly, as a community grows in number, their collective power increases, and their intellectual, volitive and executive abilities will expand. This enables them to dig deeper, discern more subtle needs, and devise more advanced means for conquering the forces of nature in their interest.

This is certainly a great blessing from God that humanity continuously grows in population. This growth is an integral element of evolution of a species from deficiency toward perfection. A large nation with a great population is nowhere comparable to a small community that is vulnerable to enemies on all sides. In terms of knowledge, choice and power, great nations and tribes far outdo small groups that are dependent on others in various aspects of government, economy, military and so on.

As with *the fate of the agents of corruption*, one should reflect on the historical accounts of the tyrannical, proud and oppressive nations which instilled horror in the hearts, filled the souls with fear, destroyed the towns, plundered the cities, shed blood, massacred the people, enslaved the servants of God, and made the necks bow before them in subjugation. God gave them respite while they waxed proud and transgressed unjustly. When they reached the climax of their power and settled on the throne of domination, they fell for the deceptive adornments of this world, and were pulled toward carnal pleasures and passions. Thus they neglected the virtue of reason, and instead plunged into the diversions of this life. They assumed their desires to be their gods, and God led them astray despite their knowledge [45:23]. Hence, they were stripped of their power and influence, lost their bounties, and were dispersed like the children of Saba'.[1]

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1 This is an Arabic expression based on a story where the ten sons of the King

How many kaisers, pharaohs, chosroes, huangdis and others are buried in the scrolls of history? What remains of them is merely a name, and sometimes not even that. Their empires were wiped out, and their spheres of influence can only be found in some historical reports at most. It is a divine custom in the world of creation that human life would only persist if it is based on reason. If the bounds of reason are transgressed toward corruption, whether individually or collectively, then creation does not tolerate it. The forces at work in the universe will oppose such a movement, will crush it in their grind, and will reduce it to humiliation and misery.

وَ إِنْ كانَ طائِفَةٌ مِنْكُمْ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ وَ طائِفَةٌ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّى يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنا وَ هُوَ خَيْرُ الْحاكِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(7:87) ***If a group of you have believed in what I have been sent with, and a group have not believed, be patient until Allah judges between us, and He is the best of judges."***

This is the fourth specific command of Shuʿayb to his people. He ordered them to patience in case they find a split between themselves in terms of belief and disbelief. Before this, he invited them all to believe in God and do good [as we saw in the previous verses]. But apparently he realized that this would not materialize, and there would be no escape from division. He felt that the arrogant elite among his people—those who used to threaten the people and bar them from God's way—would venture to make mischief on the land and persecute the believers. This would undermine the fortitude of the believers, and make their hearts yield in the face of challenge. Thus he commanded all his people to be patient and wait for God's judgment between them, for indeed *He is the best of judges*.

This advice is in the interest of everyone. It benefits the believers because they can continue to have a peaceful life, and not fall into confusion and uncertainty regarding their religion. It also benefits the disbelievers because they would not regret committing injustice unknowingly and taking impulsive measures without proper information. God's decision would be the best arbiter between the two groups, because He does not hesitate to implement His judgment when it is its due time, nor does He wrong anyone in His judgment. Therefore, for the disbelievers [who did

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Sabaʾ deserted their father in a battle. (Trans.)

not believe Shuʿayb's religious and legislative authority], *be patient* was an "advisory command" (*al-amr al-irshādī*); while for the belivers it was also an "authoritative command" (*al-amr al-mawlawī*). His instruction was to the advantage of them all.[1]

قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يا شُعَيْبُ وَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنا أَوْ لَتَعُودُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنا قالَ أَ وَ لَوْ كُنَّا كارِهِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(7:88) ***The elite of his people who were arrogant said, "O Shuʿayb, we will surely expel you and the faithful who are with you from our town, or else you shall surely revert to our creed." He said, "What! Even if we should be unwilling?!***

The arrogant elite among his people did not accept Shuʿayb's advice to be patient and wait for God's decisive judgment. Instead, they began to threaten him and the believers that they would drive them out of their land unless they conformed to their religion and apostatized from monotheism.

They verbs that they used—*we will surely expel you* (la-nukhrijannaka) and *you shall surely revert* (la-taʿūdunna)—are stressed by the letter *lām*, which indicates a vow, and the stressed letter *nūn*, which indicates emphasis. This shows their firm determination to expatriate them. That is why upon hearing this threat, Shuʿayb turned to God and asked Him to sort out the matter.

… He said, "What! Even if we should be unwilling?!: Shuʿayb's response is on behalf of himself and the believers among his people. He declared their reluctance to revert to polytheism, as clarified by what comes next. This means that if they were forced to choose one of the two options above, they would certainly not choose the option of reverting.

قَدِ افْتَرَيْنا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِباً إِنْ عُدْنا فِي مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّانَا اللَّهُ مِنْها وَ ما يَكُونُ لَنا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيها إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنا وَسِعَ رَبُّنا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْماً عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنا رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنا وَ بَيْنَ قَوْمِنا بِالْحَقِّ وَ أَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفاتِحِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

(7:89) ***We would be fabricating a lie against Allah should we revert***

1 For the two types of command, see my footnote under verse 7:19 above. (Trans.)

to your creed after Allah has delivered us from it. It does not behoove us to return to it, unless Allah, our Lord, should will so. Our Lord embraces all things in [His] knowledge. In Allah we have put our trust." "Our Lord! Decide justly between us and our people, and You are the best of deciders!"

Here Shuʿayb explains the reason for their reluctance, mentioned at the end of the last verse: *What! Even if we should be unwilling?!* (7:88). They were unwilling to conform to the majority because that meant ascribing partners to God, which is a false allegation, not to mention the other false laws and statements that are ascribed to God in idolatry.

… should we revert to your creed after Allah has delivered us from it…: Some exegetes have said that this expression shows that Shuʿayb used to be a polytheist and worshiped idols before he was appointed a prophet. This is a very implausible argument, and a claim that is far from Shuʿayb's sanctity. As we said above, here Shuʿayb is speaking on behalf of himself and the believers among his people. These believers were previously polytheists, until God saved them from polytheism and guided them to monotheism on the hand of Shuʿayb. Therefore, *Allah has delivered us* is an example of describing an *entire* group by what holds for the *majority* of its members.

The above answer is applicable if what is meant in the verse is *outward* deliverance of someone who is actually a polytheist and subscribes to idolatry. Another possibility is *real* deliverance, which includes exemption from all forms of error, both actual and hypothetical, whether before or after their occurrence. This sense of deliverance would apply to both Shuʿayb—who never associated anyone with God even for the blink of an eye—and his people—who were polytheists before they believed in Shuʿayb. They were all saved from polytheism by God, because if any soul is left to itself, it would be on the road to perdition. No one is in charge of any benefit or harm for oneself; any good that reaches anyone is from God.[1]

… It does not behoove us to return to it, unless Allah, our Lord, should will so…: Here Shuʿayb adds to his previous reply by advancing to something that is a more decisive refusal. It is as if he says: "We are unwilling to revert to your creed because that would be forging a lie against God. Rather, that is impossible to occur!" "Unwillingness" implies that the act is *possible*, but difficult to do. Here, Shuʿayb raises the level by saying that what they demand is in fact *impossible*.

Saying that *It does not behoove us to return to it* is equivalent to saying,

1 See verses 24:21 and 16:53. (Trans.)

"We will never return to it whatsoever." This implies that "we will never return under no conceivable circumstances, even if God wills." Such an emphatic statement is against the courtesy and manners of God's prophets, because it does not take into account God's absolute authority. That is why Shuʿayb qualified his statement by incorporating God's overriding decree: *unless Allah, our Lord, should will so*. It is possible for any human to err, in which case God may penalize the person by withholding His special attention from him and take away his faith. Therefore, it is always possible for anyone to fall into error and perish.

Shuʿayb referred to God not just with the proper noun *Allah*, but also added *our Lord*. This is what distinguishes monotheism from polytheism. The idolaters accepted Allah as their main deity on the top, but they believed in multiple lords that governed various aspects and parts of the creation, such as "the lord of sea," "the lord of land" and so forth. However, according to monotheism, Allah is not only the sole deity, but also the sole lord. He is One Who rules as He wills and directs all our affairs.

… Our Lord embraces all things in [His] knowledge…: This sentence serves to explain why Shuʿayb made an exception. It is as if he is asked, "Why did you made an exception after your firm and unqualified statement?" So here he explains: "Because my Lord embraces all things in His knowledge, and I do not know what He knows except for whatever He teaches me. Perhaps He has willed something that I am ignorant of. Whether I like it or not, He might have willed that we would disobey Him in some respect and thus He makes us revert to your creed, even though we are reluctant about it today." Perhaps this is why he then added: *In Allah we have put our trust*, because if one relies on God, God will suffice him and protect him from any evil that he fears.

At this point, what we have is that the polytheists declared their resolute decision to expatriate the believers unless they revert. In response, Shuʿayb declared their determination to certainly not revert to their creed. In this situation [of deadlock], he turned to his Lord and asked Him to sort things out.

… Our Lord! Decide* (iftaḥ, from fatḥ) *justly between us and our people, and You are the best of deciders: He made this prayer on behalf of himself and the believers. He asked God to make an "opening" (*fatḥ*) between them—including himself and his followers—and the polytheists among his people. "Making an opening" between two things means taking one away from the other, such that they are no longer in contact with one another. Therefore, what is meant by *fatḥ* here is a decisive final judgment

that separates between the two groups. Such judgment entails the destruction of the wrongdoers or something to that effect. Shuʿayb referred to this figuratively by using the word *fatḥ* (opening, victory, separation), and did not specify who shall be saved and who shall perish, or who will win and who will lose. He knew that God will certainly be on his side, and that *Indeed today disgrace and distress pursue the faithless* [16:27], but he expressed his prayer in a just and unbiased way. This shows his courtesy before God, because he deferred the matter to His decision. We read a similarly unbiased statement from him above, where he said to his people: *be patient until Allah judges between us, and He is the best of judges* (7:87).

Khayr al-Ḥākimīn (the best of judges) and *Khayr al-Fātiḥīn* (the best of deciders) are two of the excellent names of God. We just discussed the meaning of *fatḥ*, and we also explained the meaning of *ḥukm* (judgment, rule, verdict).[1] By God's will, we will have an elaborate discussion on the excellent names of God in the same chapter, under the verse: *To Allah belong the Best Names, so supplicate Him by them…* (7:180).

وَ قالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتُمْ شُعَيْباً إِنَّكُمْ إِذاً لَخاسِرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

(7:90) ***The elite of his people who were faithless said, "If you follow Shuʿayb, you will indeed be losers."***

"Following" here means "belief." They said this as a warning to those who had believed in Shuʿayb or wanted to believe in him. This was an example of their "threatening and barring" which Shuʿayb prohibited them from: *And do not lie in wait on every road threatening and barring from the way of Allah* (7:86). Among all their threats, this one is mentioned specifically because it is a prelude to what is stated later, after their destruction: *Those who impugned Shuʿayb were themselves the losers* (7:92).

It is also possible that "following" (*ittibāʿ*) is meant in its literal and physical sense, which is "to walk behind someone and pursue the same path as another person." The arrogant elite gave Shuʿayb and his companions two options: to either leave their land, or to revert to their creed. Then they heard his unwavering resolution that he will surely not revert

1 This was discussed above, briefly under verse 7:87, and more elaborately in the section entitled "Narrations about merging the deeds of good-doers and evil-doers." Also see the author's exposition of the verses and discussion of traditions under verses 5:41-50; volume 10, pp. 178ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

to their creed, followed by prayers like: *Our Lord! Decide justly between us and our people, and You are the best of deciders* (7:89). This assured them that Shuʿayb would certainly leave them and migrate to another place, and those who believe in him will likewise follow him and migrate. In this light they warned the believers: *If you follow Shuʿayb, you will indeed be losers*. They engaged in fearmongering to dissuade the believers from following Shuʿayb and migrating from the town, so that Shuʿayb may go by himself. After all, their real and primary enemy was Shuʿayb, and they opposed the believers because of him.

Either way, as we said, this verse is a prelude to a subsequent verse: *Those who impugned Shuʿayb were themselves the losers* (7:92).

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دارِهِمْ جاثِمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(7:91) ***So the earthquake seized them, and they lay* (aṣbaḥū) *lifeless prostrate in their homes.***

The verb *aṣbaḥa* is synonymous with *ṣāra* (to become, to turn out). It can also mean "to enter into the morning." We explained the meaning of this verse under a similar verse in the story of Ṣāliḥ above [7:78].

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْباً كَأَنْ لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْباً كانُوا هُمُ الْخاسِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

(7:92) ***Those who impugned Shuʿayb became as if* (ka-an) *they had never lived there* (yaghnaw fīhā). *Those who impugned Shuʿayb were themselves the losers.***

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> When the verb *ghaniya* is used with the preposition *fī* (in) and a place as its object, it means "staying there for a long time, such that the person is sufficient and needless (*ghanī*) of anywhere else [to dwell in]." God says: *as if they had never lived there* (yaghnaw fīhā).

In this verse, *ka-an* is originally *ka-anna*, but the stress [on the letter *nūn*] is dropped because it is followed by a verbal sentence (*fiʿliyyah*).

Those who impugned Shuʿayb became as if they had never lived there…: The verse compares those who rejected Shuʿayb to a community who stay for only a short while in a place and then move on swiftly. Such a community have an easy time packing up and leaving, because they

have no attachments to family, relatives, home, land and property. On the contrary, if one chooses a place as home, settles down, stays there for a long time, and develops attachments to various aspects of worldly life in that place, then leaving the place will be very difficult—almost impossible—for that person. This is even more true if we are talking about a community who has lived in a land for generations, and have invested in its development. Although Shuʿayb's people had long-lasting roots in that land, they left their homes and everything they had there in the shortest span of time, as soon as the earthquake seized them. They fell down on their faces and knees, as they ended up dead in their town. They thought that Shuʿayb and his followers would be losers, but their speculation went wrong and instead came down on themselves, making *them* the losers. *They plotted, and Allah also plotted, and Allah is the best of plotters* [3:54].

God depicts this failure and reversal of their expectation as follows: (1) First He narrates their claim that whoever follows Shuʿayb is a loser [7:90]. (2) Then He mentions the occurrence of the punishment without specifying who was seized by the earthquake, as He says: *So the earthquake seized them* (7:91), instead of "So the earthquake seized the disbelievers." (3) At last He states explicitly: *Those who impugned Shuʿayb…* (7:92). Thus He clarifies that His judgment was in favor of Shuʿayb and his followers, and against those who rejected him among his people. So *they* were the losers who were caught in a plot.

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَ قالَ يا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسالاتِ رَبِّي وَ نَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ آسى عَلى قَوْمٍ كافِرِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(7:93) ***So he abandoned them [to their fate] and said, "O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the messages of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher. So how should I grieve*** (āsá) ***for a faithless lot?"***

The verb *āsá* is derived from the noun *asá*, which means *ḥuzn* (grief, sorrow, sadness). The context suggests that Shuʿayb turned away from them and said this *after* the occurrence of the punishment and their death. Therefore, what he says here is meant as a lesson for others. The rest of the verse should be clear.

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.